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INTRODUCTION

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In early 2022, the United Nations' Secretary-General António Guterres gave a statement in which he called for “young people to have a seat at the table – forging inclusive solutions that combine peace and security, sustainable development and human rights.”¹ As the 2023 class of International Relations, we are those young voices, and our diverse perspectives and backgrounds are what guide us in this analysis of *Our Common Agenda*. As we stand on the precipice of a new chapter, with a chance to take what we have learned into the world and effect change, we leave you with this – a project to define ourselves as a class and as International Relations scholars, giving insight to what we see for the future of our society and our world. We hope that this report persuades the United Nations to listen to the recommendations here provided by knowledgeable youth eager to offer a different outlook on current issues that stem from the interplay of colonialism, hierarchy, and sovereignty, and other themes such as the environment, health, and development.

The UN is an organization that prides itself in embracing diversity in all its forms. This also encompasses the open-mindedness to listen to groups who have not always been heard on how to address the problems that plague the world today. As a collective, we recognize our limitations; we are not experts in our fields, we only have a limited amount of experience in the workforce of our respective areas of study, and we are young. However, we believe that these factors can play in our favour. For one, as the UN has stated in its World Programme of Action for Youth, “young people represent agents, beneficiaries and victims of major societal changes,” a statement that effectively summarizes our interest in taking action in the areas highlighted in this report and in accordance with the Our Common Agenda (OCA).² Secondly, our studies in

¹ António Guterres, “Remarks at Opening of High-Level Conference on Youth Inclusive Peace Processes” (January 20, 2022),

² United Nations Economic and Social Affairs, *World Programme of Action for Youth*, 6.

International Relations at Western University have been intensive and varied, thus providing our class with many different perspectives and specializations, making us a very integrated group. Finally, our recommendations stem from a powerful paradox highlighted by the UN: the fact that we, as young people, “seek to be integrated into an existing order or to serve as a force to transform that order.”³ Considering the themes highlighted in the OCA and the current state of affairs in the world, we have decided it is best to transform some elements of the existing order, with the end goal of achieving a better society confident in its potential for a better future.

Despite being students of International Relations, we are global citizens first. This report embodies the culmination of our studies and the growing concern we have developed for the world we have studied these past four years. The work in this report is guided by an application of our academic knowledge, but not limited to this. Our collective learning has been vast across the discipline of International Relations itself and outside of it; students in the class bring outside knowledge through our minors and specializations in other fields, including linguistics, gender and sexuality studies, transitional justice, psychology, and business. We speak as a collective from a place of concern for the world we have inherited and the disparities in what this inheritance looks like; as a global community, the gaps in well-being are astonishing as they vary from country to country. As students, we have coupled this concern with a rejection of the paradigms we have learned, seeking to offer alternatives. We care deeply about these issues not because we were taught to but because we decided to learn from a place of concern.

We wanted to begin from an angle that understood the limitations of the UN; we felt the OCA was both a modern and relevant framework to do this. In the early stages, we began with various rounds of preliminary case studies and pitches, through which we established our

³ Ibid, 6.

specific issues across our proposed cases. From there, we identified three dominant elements of the political paradigm we wished to tackle: colonialism, sovereignty, and hierarchy. Based on these umbrella issues, we then picked our five main case studies. These five were chosen based on urgency and relevance to the global political economy, configured around our cumulative learning and individual passions.

The OCA itself reflects the global desire to move forward into the future with better foundations to address the issues of today, being mindful of the potential issues of tomorrow. However, the OCA's biggest shortcomings are its inability to address the pervasive effects of colonialism, the outdated system of hierarchy, and the anachronous understanding of sovereignty. The analysis of these themes, their relation to current and future issues, and recommendations on related problems are further explained in this report using case studies. The OCA is undoubtedly a move in the right direction, but it is not flawless. It requires concerted efforts to be truly meaningful, which is why this document is a humble suggestion on how to do exactly that: how to extrapolate the findings and recommendations of carefully selected case studies into the larger spheres of international concern, revising existing concepts like colonialism, hierarchy, and sovereignty and creating new paradigms for all communities affected.

We began by individually reading the report, then coming together to discuss it, establishing a group consensus on where we diverged and agreed with the OCA. From there, the project took its early form; we decided that given the ambition of the document, we should capitalize on this in a more realistic manner to address the same concerns discussed by the Secretary-General. Although revisionist in nature, our report recognizes that the OCA is an achievement in and of itself and should be praised for the important observations it makes. For

one, the emphasis on an equitable world society that focuses on “leaving no one behind” would not have been possible in a different time. The OCA ultimately provides an outline to guide international efforts. These efforts aim to better the world in ways that are compatible with the UN’s values and goals, such as promoting peace, preventing conflict, building trust among states and communities, and ensuring sustainable financing. Specific to our report, we will be identifying and analyzing what we believe to be five pressing issues brought up in the OCA, which we believe are defined by elements of colonialism, hierarchy, and sovereignty.

The report begins with a historical analysis of the UN, then utilizes a case study method that outlines the issue, previously failed efforts, then recommendations, serving as a blueprint for future reforms. We first begin by assessing the current Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar. This case study establishes our responsibility, as outlined in the OCA, to “leave no one behind.” By analyzing this refugee crisis and the current UN response, we identify why a better solution is needed in managing displaced peoples and migration. We then look at the global effects of climate change through a comparison of recent floods in Pakistan and Germany. This is followed by our revisions of the current plan of action for sustainable development provided through a historical revision of economic programmes in Ghana during the 1980s. Next, we offer an analysis of the response to the polio epidemic to formulate recommendations dealing with COVID-19 and future global health crises. We conclude with a final case study on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch to address issues related to the political and environmental implications of this amassment of waste and the global commons more broadly.

The case studies are designed to look at the specificities of each problem as they manifest locally and then more broadly as they display themselves in other parts of the world. They conclude with recommendations that address these specific/local challenges, and the broader

underlying problems of colonialism, hierarchy, and sovereignty. We understand that criticism comes more readily than offering constructive solutions. Our intentions are to ground our work in analysis and resolution building. We seek to comment on the highlighted issues in good spirit and with hope for a better future. Our goal is not to be dismissive or negative but rather constructive, and we hope we have thoroughly conveyed this to you.

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COLONIALISM, HIERARCHY, AND SOVEREIGNTY

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List of Acronyms

GATT – General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IR – International Relations

NIEO – New International Economic Order

OCA – Our Common Agenda

P5 – Permanent Five

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UK – The United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNCTAD – United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

US – The United States

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WWII – World War II

The three entities, sovereignty, colonialism, and hierarchy are institutionalized structures in the machinery of the United Nations. These multifaceted and interlinked notions have put constraints on the UN spatial apparatus. Thus, this section acts as the backdrop for the following five case studies.

Revisiting the San Francisco Conference of 1945 and the Creation of the UNO

Without consideration of colonialism, it is impossible to comprehend the history of the United Nations. The UN has institutionalized colonial power structures, which simultaneously drove the post-war international agenda. Despite the emergence of anti-colonial sentiments on

the global stage, the legacy of colonialism shaped a power dynamic defined by colonized nations as benefactors and the colonies as beneficiaries. During the debate about establishing UN standards, norms, ideals, and the founding of the Security Council, this colonial narrative was further ingrained, this time legally, within the UN's organizational structure.

Political scientists Kohn and Kavita define colonialism as “a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another.”⁴ The history of colonialism is long and overarching, spanning centuries and has plagued the international order for years prior to the creation of the UN. According to Kohn and Reddy, the “colonial project emerged when it became possible to move people across oceans and being able to politically control despite the geographical location.”⁵ The colonization of nations led to the growth and transformation of the European economy.⁶ According to Ringmar, “colonial possessions became a symbol of great-power status and the new European nation-states often proved themselves to be very aggressive colonizers.”⁷

The Berlin Conference (1884) was a turning point in international relations regarding colonialism. This event cemented the divide between powerful nations and the colonized nations. The conference was organized to divide and regulate the “scramble for Africa.”⁸ Here, more powerful nations saw the possibilities of economic exploitation in Africa: “there was plenty of money to be made in getting resources such as “gold, ivory, diamonds, coppers, among other.”⁹ Much of what the Berlin Conference did was ignore the borders already determined by African

⁴ Kohn, Margaret, and Kavita Reddy. “Colonialism.” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Stanford University, August 29, 2017.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ringmar, Erik. “Chapter 8.” Essay. In *History of International Relations: A Non-European Perspective*. Cambridge: finish

⁸ Gathara, Patrick. “Berlin 1884: Remembering the Conference That Divided Africa.” Conflict | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, November 15, 2019.

⁹ Ibid.

Indigenous peoples. The conference laid out guidelines for colonial claims, defining a new political geography across Africa. It also led to the displacement of Indigenous peoples due to this realignment.¹⁰

The development of race was one of the most important and pernicious consequences of the late 19th century phase of European imperial expansion. Scientific racism first emerged to justify the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism.¹¹ The justifications for colonialism started with slavery in the Americas, which was exclusively linked to skin colour. Those enslaved were dehumanized and treated as property. Examples of racist justifications for colonialism included arguments that the lives of colonized peoples required “improvement” and that the “lower races” needed to be governed by “civilized governments” of white nations.¹²

Other social sciences have taken the question of race more seriously than IR. This is because, after 1945, Eurocentric institutionalism grew to replace the prior scientific racism.¹³ Eurocentrism is defined by Arifin as, “...a form of thoughts that often measures and defines non-European civilisation through historical, cultural, religious, geographical scientific and progressive perspectives based on Western or European values, which is considered to be supreme.”¹⁴ Race and racism are implicated in and perpetuated by the study of IR and the world order.

The most conspicuous application of Eurocentrism, colonialism and hierarchy within the UN is in the creation of the Security Council, in particular having five countries (the US, UK,

¹⁰ Gathara, Patrick. “Berlin 1884: Remembering the Conference That Divided Africa.” *Conflict* | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, November 15, 2019.

¹¹ Amitav Acharya, “Race and racism in the founding of the modern world order,” *International Affairs* 98, no. 1 (2022): 27, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab198>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 30.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁴ Azmi Arifin. “Eurocentrism and the Historical Perception about the Malays,” *SHS Web of Conferences* 45: 1. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20184506005>.

USSR, France and China) with permanent membership. Establishing the P5 confirmed the “perceived status and privilege of these nations,” and their role as responsible leaders in charge of educating other nations on the path of ‘achieving’ sovereignty.¹⁵ By placing these five states in a position with almost complete control of the whole UN, the organization is confirming that they are based on their “natural sovereignty.”¹⁶ In order for the Security Council to function, other states give up part of their sovereignty when they allow the Council to make decisions which involve interventions, even military, on their soil.¹⁷ The Security Council represents what the historical sociologist Katy Harsant calls neocolonial technologies of power, which are “strategies of control designed to replace colonial practices.”¹⁸ The consequences of hierarchy and colonialism on the workings of the SC are evident within the liberal principle of non-intervention, which only relates to so-called “civilized” European states. It is only non-white, non-European nations which required intervening as they were considered “barbaric” and “savages,” in need of being “civilized.”¹⁹ For example, the UN has backed ‘humanitarian’ interventions in former colonies such as Rwanda, Liberia, Somalia, and Haiti.

Hierarchy was reinforced by economic conditions. The Washington administration utilized financial incentives to persuade its allies to adopt its international economic strategy that emphasized capitalist models, interdependent markets, and the US dollar as the stabilizer of the global monetary system.²⁰ According to Gabriel Kolko, American foreign policy was motivated by constructing a global order so that U.S. businesses could trade, operate, and profit without

¹⁵ Katy Harsant. *Selective Responsibility in the United Nations: Colonial Histories and Critical Inquiry* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 65.

¹⁶ Harsant, *Selective Responsibility*, 75.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁹ Hobson, “Re-embedding the global colour line,” 87.

²⁰ Francine McKenzie, “Exporting the American Experience: Global Economic Governance and the Foreign Economic Policy of the Truman Administration,” *A Companion to Harry S. Truman*, 2012, pp. 109-130, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118300718.ch6>, 112.

limitations.²¹ Nonetheless, the postwar system affirmed that liberal economic theory was applicable to all peoples and places. Those countries that were most ‘developed’, meaning industrialized and modern (another Western conception) were privileged within the UN system. The West deemed itself “civilized” and liberal Western states tried to transform the ‘Third World’ to Western standards, reinforcing the belief that non-Western states needed saving.²² While a liberal approach to international trade and the global economy of international commerce benefit all nations, industrialized members received disproportionate benefits of this system. As the long-term solution to managing foreign debts, the postwar liberal economy legitimized ongoing requests for more access to markets in the Global South.²³ In other words, a liberal global economy increased the control of industrialized powers over resources and attached disadvantages to the developing nations.

Sovereignty, another cardinal principle of the UN (Article 2), also has Eurocentric beginnings and can be connected to colonialism. Westphalian sovereignty is Eurocentric because Europeans created the principle in Europe for European states.²⁴ Colonialism is rooted in Eurocentrism as European beliefs were spread through imperial expansion. The European settlers wanted the New World to be “a world after its own image”. Instead, they created a world that had racialized differentiation.²⁵ As European colonial powers established the principles of Westphalian sovereignty in other parts of the world, it became a universal model for international relations and organizations, including the UN. States, such as the United Kingdom

²¹ Ibid, 112.

²² Hobson, “Re-embedding the global colour line,” 88.

²³ Francine McKenzie, “Gatt and Global Order in the Postwar Era,” 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108860192>.

²⁴ Harold Bauder and Rebecca Mueller, “Westphalian vs. Indigenous Sovereignty: Challenging Colonial Territorial Governance,” *Geopolitics* (2021): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2021.1920577>.

²⁵ Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-determination* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691184340-fm>.

or France, have their sovereignty as a natural right and are more advanced.²⁶ It is their state's features that have created the Western definition of what a 'civilized, sovereign' nation should be – and by extension, what colonized territories need to conform to.²⁷ It also creates the idea that past issues of colonialism no longer exist once a state gains its sovereignty.²⁸

Colonial peoples were excluded from the San Francisco conference, and so were Indigenous peoples. The Western-centric idea of sovereignty has been utilized in the UN system to the detriment of Indigenous and non-sovereign peoples. To further decolonize the United Nations, we must address the Northern and Western-centric ideas of sovereignty installed in the international organization. Westphalian sovereignty understands the state as the supreme political authority which holds legitimate power over the occupants of their territory.²⁹ From the first draft of the UN Charter at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, a Western-centric idea of sovereignty has been promoted and codified.³⁰

Western ideals of sovereignty within the United Nations have been installed through path dependency. Path dependency is the idea that past events and decisions unduly impact the ability to make decisions later. Path dependency theory can explain why UN reforms will continue to be ineffective unless they first address structural issues and inequalities.³¹ A UN system created by a few states cannot accurately address and understand the issues of all people across the globe. For example, participation within the UN is predicated on a Eurocentric model of the nation-

²⁶ Harsant, *Selective Responsibility*, 23.

²⁷ Ibid., 25.

²⁸ Ibid., 23.

²⁹ Harald Bauder & Rebecca Mueller (2021): Westphalian Vs. Indigenous Sovereignty: Challenging Colonial Territorial Governance, *Geopolitics*, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2021.1920577. 2.

³⁰ Glanville, Luke. 2013.

Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect : A New History. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,. 136.

³¹ Loga, Cardow, A., & Asquith, A. (2022). Path-dependency theory in a post-conflict state: the case of Fiji. *Journal of Management History* (2006), 28(3), <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMH-06-2021-0037>. 363.

state, which emphasizes fixed borders and sovereignty.³² A lack of non-traditional and non-western voices during the creation of the Charter can explain why the UN system fails to address the issues of Indigenous and stateless people. The path dependency theory can explain the presence of Westphalian sovereignty and many structural inequalities of the United Nations system.

The logic of colonialism, hierarchy, and to a lesser extent sovereignty, were challenged in 1945.³³ From the onset, the creation of the United Nations was riddled with power struggles between colonial powers and smaller nations.³⁴ The popular historical re-telling of the founding of the UN at Dumbarton Oak and San Francisco frames the UN as an international body based upon universal human rights with the ultimate goal of preventing the recurrence of a third World War.³⁵ When the logic of this was connected to the existence of colonies, discussions were among the colonial powers.³⁶ Representatives of the colonized territories were never granted the opportunity to shape the UN. Nonetheless, they made their case known. Groups and unions formed on the basis of decolonization, such as the West Indies National Council, which attempted to argue for the inclusion of decolonization and independence on the agenda, but were shut down repeatedly.³⁷ The response to the West Indies' appeal arguing for independence and control over their own resources and the African Academy of Arts and Research lobby to bring African independence to the discussion was that the singular purpose of the San Francisco

³² Maksoud, Clovis. 1995. "Diminished Sovereignty, Enhanced Sovereignty: United Nations-Arab League Relations at 50." *The Middle East Journal* 49 (4): 584.

³³ Harsant, *Selective Responsibility*, 20.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

Conference was creating the United Nations to maintain security and peace, not to address racial and colonial issues at that time.³⁸

Decolonization and After

As colonies became independent, they joined the UN as sovereign members, starting with India and Pakistan in 1947. These post-colonial states were usually supportive of the Westphalian system of sovereignty, but they were critical of the colonial and hierarchical practices of the UN and the international system that persisted despite decolonization. Persistent and widening inequality was central to the critique of colonialism.³⁹

Newly independent states strove to make the global economic order and international economic institutions work for their interests as much as those of developed countries. They had considerable evidence to back up their claim. For example, the long period of low prices for primary commodities from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s deprived postcolonial states of much-needed resources of paying for development programmes at home.⁴⁰ Raúl Prebisch, an economist from Argentina and the first director-general of UNCTAD, claimed that rather than encouraging the growth and industrialization of the Global South, the liberal definition of international labour confined peripheral nations to the position of producers and suppliers of basic goods and raw materials.⁴¹ According to Prebisch, "great industrial centers" and peripheral nations were not equally benefiting from the economic prosperity promised by liberalism. In 1964, developing states organized the G77 within the UN to draw attention to persistent and structural economic inequality, culminating in the call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). The UN

³⁸ Ibid., 60-61.

³⁹ Julia Dehm, "Righting Inequality: Human Rights Responses to Economic Inequality in the United Nations," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 10, no. 3 (2019): pp. 443-459, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2019.0022>.

⁴⁰ Trentin, "The 1980s 'Debt Crisis' in the Middle East and North Africa: Framing Regional Dynamics within the International Stage at UNCTAD,"

⁴¹ McKenzie, "Gatt and Global Order in the Postwar Era."

hosted a special session in 1974 to discuss the NIEO. The objective of the NIEO, as Nils Gilman explains, was to transform the governance of the global economy to redirect more of the benefits of transnational integration toward developing nations.⁴² Drawing on dependency theory, he named global relations between the “center” and the “periphery” as one of “lopsided development,” and suggested that the increasing disequilibrium produced ongoing neocolonialism.⁴³ The NIEO entailed a redistribution of power which would offset the colonial and hierarchical structure of the UN. The United States and other developed countries disregarded the demands made by developing countries for “fair prices” in terms of trade and to have sovereign control over their natural resources.⁴⁴ While the urgency for global cooperation was recognized in this context, dominant powers focused on liberalizing the global economy and international trade to promote economic growth rather than address inequality in the global economy.

Newly independent states worked within and beyond the UN-system to create an international system that was more inclusive and that resisted the dominance of the Cold War superpowers and imperial states. Many ‘Third World’ states, led by Indonesia, Yugoslavia, Egypt and India refused to align themselves exclusively with the US or the USSR in the Cold War. There were several reasons behind this decision, including that alignment with either side would equate to neo-colonialism and dependency on either side within a bipolar world order. At the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Non-Aligned Movement was born, which helped to advance the post-imperial world order by securing the right to self-determination.⁴⁵ This new

⁴² Dehm, “Righting Inequality: Human Rights Responses to Economic Inequality in the United Nations.”

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, 5.

international order was established through postcolonialism. It promoted principles of independence, equality of states, and freedom from domination in international affairs.⁴⁶

The UN secretariat positioned itself to support decolonization and newly independent states. In 1949, the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories was established. Nations with colonies or that played the role of a “trustee” were expected to complete a questionnaire on their colonies to prove their knowledge for their territories. The questionnaire covered every aspect of the social, economic, and educational conditions in the territories.⁴⁷ Despite the limitations on the UN’s authority in this area, it was attempting to establish some oversight and as well as a form of accountability with respect to colonial administration. Imperial powers resisted any incursion on their “sovereign” authority in colonies and trust territories and prevented the UN from expanding its role in colonial matters⁴⁸.

In the 1960s, the UN also proposed recommendations for reconciliation efforts with colonialism. These resolutions were not enforceable, but positioned the organization in opposition to colonialism. The first resolution (1514 XV, 1960), followed the admission of 17 African nations to the UN, affirmed the need to put an end promptly and unconditionally to colonialism in all its forms and manifestations.⁴⁹ Resolution 2106 XX of 1965 also condemned colonialism and all segregationists and discriminatory practices that accompany it, under whatever form and wherever they exist.⁵⁰ Although symbolically meaningful, these resolutions did not address the deep roots of colonialism or acknowledge the UN’s own culpability in perpetuating colonialism and racism in its own operations.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁷ Nations Encyclopedia. “Independence of Colonial Peoples - the Role of the UN.” Encyclopedia of the Nations, 2022.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Colonialism Reparation. “Colonialism Reparation.” Colonialism Reparation, 2009.

Tying this back to *Our Common Agenda* and the goals it sets out to achieve, the way to establish trust and restore multilateralism within the UN requires coming to terms with colonialism, hierarchy and sovereignty. While the UN aims to be a progressive multilateral body that strives to promote equality and peace among the global community, its lack of effectiveness stems from a history rooted in colonial and hierarchal structures and racist discourse. Additionally, core principles held by the UN, such as sovereignty, have been westernized in nature and, therefore, leave out the voices and perspectives of marginalized groups such as Indigenous peoples. Achieving effective multilateralism within the UN is not impossible. However, the starting point to this would be to recognize and correct the UN's problematic history and foundation, not only to solve the problems of our past but to create inclusive solutions for the future.

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REFUGEES CASE STUDY
The Myanmar Rohingya Refugee Crisis

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List of Acronyms

ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ICJ - International Court of Justice

IOM - International Organization for Migration

JRP - Joint Response Plan

NUG - National Unity Government

OCA - Our Common Agenda

UNHCR - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNSC - UN Security Council

Executive Summary

The outbreak of the Rohingya refugee displacement crisis in 2017 has highlighted significant inequalities and human rights violations in Myanmar and the United Nations (UN). While human rights promotion and protection are supposedly administered by the UN, the Rohingya – a Muslim minority group – continue to face catastrophic discrimination in their homeland. Moreover, after a military coup seized Myanmar in 2021, the Rohingya faced heightened armed violence. The military junta remains in power in the state and receives weapons from UN member-states.⁵¹ The UN-led international response to the crisis has focused primarily on repatriation, despite the battered living conditions in Myanmar that keep forcing the Rohingya to seek asylum. Unfortunately, the junta's power has been fueled by imported weapons and funding, placing the Rohingya's chance at repatriation at an all-time low.

⁵¹ These states include: China, Russia, Serbia and India.

Developed as a binding follow-up document to Article 14 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees codifies the UN's definitions and protocols concerning refugees and asylum seekers.⁵² In the Convention, the UN defines a refugee as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”⁵³ Under the definition of the 1951 Convention of Non-Refoulment, the Rohingya cannot be returned to their homeland or to a region where they could potentially be victims under Article 33 of the Convention.⁵⁴ UN officials and international actors consider the risk of irreparable harm to refugees if the humanitarian response to the crisis expels them from their host country and returns them to their home state. Therefore, when considering the UN's push for the repatriation of Rohingya refugees, the core principle of non-refoulment must be applied. At this point, the international response to the refugee crisis must tackle the Rohingya's suffering in Myanmar before repatriation is even on the table.

The Rohingya have been displaced in Myanmar for decades. Since the 1990s, over one million Rohingya have been stateless, without proper citizenship, and forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries. The refugee crisis hit an unprecedented size in 2017 after the eruption of violence in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. Over 740,000 Rohingya sought refuge in Bangladesh to flee the conflict and concentrated attacks.⁵⁵ Rohingya communities were burned, children

⁵² Article 14.1: Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

⁵³ UNCHR The UN Refugee Agency. *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. Geneva, Switzerland: UN Headquarters, 2010, 14.

⁵⁴ Article 33.1: No Contracting State shall expel or return (“refouler”) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

⁵⁵ UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency. “UNHCR - Rohingya Emergency.” The UN Refugee Agency - Emergencies, 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/rohingya-emergency.html>.

were separated from their families, many innocent individuals were killed, and women and girls were raped and tortured.⁵⁶ Moreover, approximately 60 percent of the refugees are said to be children.⁵⁷ Many of these children have been orphaned, physically and sexually abused, and left to fend for themselves without basic rights.⁵⁸ The likelihood of the Rohingya returning to their villages in Myanmar is almost nonexistent; for the Rohingya, Myanmar is a place of violence and insecurity.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has adopted a significant humanitarian response to address violence and insecurity in Myanmar. Specifically, assistance programs have been set up to aid displaced individuals. The Cox's Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh has welcomed the majority of the Rohingya refugees. Due to the vast number of Rohingya seeking refuge, the living conditions at the camp are dangerous and overcrowded and have been exacerbated by COVID-19, natural disasters, and the effects of fires.⁵⁹ The UNHCR has worked to support the Bangladesh government by sending numerous emergency and life-saving resources for the refugees. Many support and aid workers have been stationed within the Cox's Bazar area to provide specialized services for the crisis victims. However, the current number of support workers is not sufficient for the growing complexity of the crisis.⁶⁰

In August 2018, the UN launched a Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis of 951 million USD. While the 2018 JRP was set to last until December 2018, it lacked over half of the required funding.⁶¹ After the relatively unsuccessful JRP of 2018,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ UNICEF. "Rohingya Crisis." UNICEF, May 1, 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/rohingya-crisis>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency. "UNHCR - Rohingya Emergency." The UN Refugee Agency Emergencies, 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/rohingya-emergency.html>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the UNCHR, the Bangladesh government, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) organized a new JRP in 2021 and 2022. The most recent JRP calls for 881 million USD and is set to use combined efforts from 136 partners to help Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshis in neighboring communities to the Cox's Bazar.⁶² The poor living conditions in Myanmar have essentially transferred over to the refugee camp in Bangladesh, only this time, the communities are exponentially overcrowded.⁶³ This new JRP requires international help; without financial support from developed nations, the Rohingya will continue to live impoverished and away from their homes.⁶⁴

While the Bangladesh refugee camp of Cox's Bazaar may provide temporary safety for Rohingya refugees, the living conditions do not seem to be much of an upgrade from the Rakhine State in Myanmar.⁶⁵ In early 2022, the Bangladesh government imposed new restrictions on the Rohingya, limiting their freedom of movement and independence. The Rohingya have been cut off from basic rights and opportunities; many adolescent refugees (ages 15-17) have been restricted to informal work to support themselves and their families.⁶⁶ The inadequate working conditions of informal work puts refugees at risk of exploitation and arrest. The lack of international support has left Bangladesh to primarily financially support the Rohingya, leaving it to rely on the limited support it receives from international funders. The

⁶² UN News. "Response Plan Launched to Support 1.4 Million Rohingya and Bangladeshis | | UN News." United Nations News- Global perspective Human stories. United Nations, 2022. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1115012>.

⁶³ UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency. "Myanmar Situation." Global Focus UNHRC Operations Worldwide, 2021. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/myanmarsituation>.

⁶⁴ UN News. "Response Plan Launched to Support 1.4 Million Rohingya and Bangladeshis | | UN News." United Nations News- Global perspective Human stories. United Nations, 2022. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1115012>.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch. "Bangladesh: New Restrictions on Rohingya Camps". April 4, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/04/bangladesh-new-restrictions-rohingya-camps>

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch. "Bangladesh: New Restrictions on Rohingya Camps". April 4, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/04/bangladesh-new-restrictions-rohingya-camps>

Bangladesh government does not prioritize the livelihoods of the Rohingya. Similar to the denied citizenship for the Rohingya in Myanmar, many Rohingyas are not granted refugee status or legal rights, which perpetuates their need to work informal and dangerous jobs. The Rohingya remain discriminated against in Myanmar and their host country, and until these issues and their roots are examined, a safe future for the Rohingya remains unforeseeable.⁶⁷

Financial support from external countries for the Rohingya has diminished over the past five years. Member-states have disregarded the “burden-sharing principle,” a concept introduced at the inception of the UNCHR to alleviate the possible economic, social, political, and environmental strain in relation to asylum.⁶⁸ International neglect has made keeping the Rohingya in Bangladesh unsustainable. The country lacks the proper funds, resources, and services to maintain the number of asylum seekers without aid. Until the international response becomes adequate, Rohingya refugees will continue to face hardship and, consequently, afflict the people of Bangladesh.

This report connects with the Our Common Agenda (OCA) report by the Secretary General of the United Nations through its themes of building a new social contract anchored in human rights as well as promoting peace and preventing conflicts. The urgent case study on Myanmar calls for the promotion of universal social protections, especially regarding the Rohingya minority population and the restructuring of international responses to all types of violent crises around the world, both of which are directly mentioned as proposals in the OCA.

Colonialism and the Rohingya Crisis

⁶⁷ Rana, Md Sohel, and Ali Riaz. "Securitization of the Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (2022): 00219096221082265, 137.

⁶⁸ Kathy Newland, “Cooperative Arrangements to Share Burdens and Responsibilities in Refugee Situations short of Mass Influx”. Migration Policy Institute. 2011. <https://www.unhcr.org/4ef332d29.pdf>

The case of Myanmar, like many other struggling nations across the world, has been molded by the deep roots of colonialism within its history and people. When the British empire arrived in Myanmar (then called Burma) and placed them under colonial rule from 1824 to 1948, they laid the roots for this ethnic rivalry by strategically placing two of the region's most prominent religious groups against each other, encouraging xenophobia among the populations.⁶⁹ This ultimately incited tensions that lasted centuries and laid the roots for the modern-day treatment of the anti-Rohingya violence within Myanmar.

Colonial rule under the British was highly divisive for the peoples within Burma (Myanmar) as they were constantly being displaced according to their ethnicity and religion. The colonial powers wished to separate the majority religion (Buddhism) from all state matters and heavily encouraged secular practices as well as discouraged the manifestation of Burmese culture or tradition in all forms.⁷⁰ These forms of suppression ensured that resistance or nationalistic movements could not build up over time within the Burmese Buddhists.⁷¹ Over time, tensions started to rise because the British favored minority groups such as the Rohingya Muslims and granted them administrative advantages over other groups like the Burmese Buddhist majority.⁷² As a result, the Burmese majority now regarded the Rohingya Muslims as a threat due to this divide in colonial treatment, inciting the first roots of targeted xenophobia and isolationism against the peoples.⁷³

⁶⁹ "The Colonial Era (1885-1948)," Religion and Public Life at Harvard Divinity School, 2022, <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/religion-context/country-profiles/myanmar/colonial-era-1885-1948-0>.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch, "The Resistance of the Monks - Buddhism and Activism in Burma," Human Rights Watch, April 29, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/09/22/resistance-monks/buddhism-and-activism-burma>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Krishnadev Calamur, "The Misunderstood Roots of Burma's Rohingya Crisis," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, September 30, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/rohingyas-burma/540513/>.

⁷³ Dorothy Settles, "The Rohingya Genocide Is Rooted in British Colonialism," Spheres of Influence, February 10, 2022, <https://spheresofinfluence.ca/the-rohingya-genocide-is-rooted-in-british-colonial-legacy/>.

More ethnic tensions arose with the actions of World War II as the anti-Rohingya sentiment grew. During the war, the minority groups often fought alongside the British while the Burmese majority sided with the Japanese. This meant that most often, the Rohingya were fighting against their fellow Burmese, with only religious and ethnic factors differentiating them. Moreover, after the war had been waged, British forces started to reward these ethnic minorities like the Rohingya by giving them promotions and higher-ranking positions within the administrative sector, further strengthening the divide and hostility against the Rohingya. After independence in 1948, Myanmar's systematic segregation between the nations' ethnic groups and overall Islamophobia towards the Rohingya Muslims had already been deeply entrenched and even codified into the Burmese legal system and social structures.⁷⁴ Some examples of this segregation include the citizenship bans against the Rohingya population and the perpetuation of an “illegal foreigner” rhetoric.⁷⁵ This rhetoric led to extremely harmful actions taken against the Rohingya, including the destruction of villages and mosques, rape, and murder during the years of 1978 and 1991.⁷⁶

The legacies of colonialism are also visible through the differing ways in which the world responds to crises like the Rohingya Refugee case compared to other international crises. For instance, the UN has been quick when reacting to other refugee crises like the conflict in Ukraine, whereas little to no action has been made in the case of Myanmar. This suggests an inherent racism derived as a product of colonialism that is behind the variability of responses to these crises and the priority in which they are addressed.⁷⁷ For example, the UN Security Council

⁷⁴ Dorothy Settles, “The Rohingya Genocide Is Rooted in British Colonialism,” Spheres of Influence, February 10, 2022, <https://spheresofinfluence.ca/the-rohingya-genocide-is-rooted-in-british-colonial-legacy/>.

⁷⁵ Dorothy Settles, “The Rohingya Genocide Is Rooted in British Colonialism,” Spheres of Influence, February 10, 2022, <https://spheresofinfluence.ca/the-rohingya-genocide-is-rooted-in-british-colonial-legacy/>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ameena Azeem, “A Political Inquiry into Double Standards and the Puzzle of Common Humanity,” Scholarship@Western, 2022, https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalscience_maresearchpapers/20/.

has not voted on a single resolution for actions to be taken in Myanmar, even after the horrid display of human rights abuses against the Rohingya people.⁷⁸ Even though a veto is expected from nations like Russia and China regarding this issue, other members do not attempt to show any effort for intervention. This is a stark contrast to actions made in the case of Ukraine. In response to the recent conflicts in Ukraine, UN members acted swiftly, and the Security Council successfully voted on a condemnation resolution within only 24 hours of the Russia invasion.⁷⁹

Hierarchy and the Rohingya Crisis

Acknowledging the issues of unbalanced power dynamics within the UN system is imperative to addressing the global problems discussed in this report. Issues of hierarchy in the UN system are most evident in the disproportionate authority granted to the Permanent Five (P-5) members of the UN Security Council (UNSC). The threat of a potential veto by a P-5 member of the UNSC has continued to allow an abundance of human rights abuses to occur. Even in the face of the worst possible human suffering, like the case of Myanmar, it is not surprising that the UN Human Rights Office should declare that "it is unconscionable that one veto can override the rest of humanity."⁸⁰

Hierarchy within the international community concerning the Myanmar crisis is also displayed by the responses of individual nations and their efforts in assisting the crisis. For example, Bangladesh was virtually the only country to respond to the situation by accepting the

⁷⁸ Damian Lilly et al., "The UN's Response to the Human Rights Crisis after the Coup in Myanmar: Destined to Fail?," International Peace Institute, November 9, 2022, <https://www.ipinst.org/2021/06/un-response-to-human-rights-crisis-after-coup-in-myanmar>.

⁷⁹ UN News, "Ukraine: UN General Assembly Demands Russia Reverse Course on 'Attempted Illegal Annexation' | UN News," United Nations - UN NEWS (United Nations, October 2022), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129492>.

⁸⁰ Birgit Van Hout, "Human Rights in Global Peace and Security," OHCHR, 2019, <https://europe.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=2566&LangID=E>.

majority of the refugees coming from affected areas in Myanmar.⁸¹ Despite the nation already struggling with internal issues like mass poverty, overpopulation, and lack of resources, Bangladesh assisted Myanmar and the Rohingya far more than considerably larger, wealthier countries, even after requesting backing from the rest of the UN and its members. This shows the inherent hierarchy within not only the UN but also the international community. Larger hegemonic countries like the United States could make more of a difference to help this situation but choose not to, influencing other nations to also hold back from giving aid and resources.⁸² Additionally, it is important to note that most of the nations who have the means to assist countries like Myanmar reside in the P-5 members of the UNSC, meaning the lack of individual concern or action is also preventing collective action within the international community as a whole. This type of hierarchical structure and power order is extremely dangerous as this intensifies human rights abuses within the affected territory and perpetuates the racist, anti-Muslim rhetoric that the West has promoted throughout history.

In the case of the Rohingya population and the crisis in Myanmar, the United States' stance moved from the anti "illegal" immigrant sentiment towards more of a stronger anti-Muslim tone instead, largely influenced by the events of 9/11 and America's "war on terror."⁸³ This "war on terror" campaign affected Myanmar's social and political landscape as demonstrated through the series of anti-Muslim riots across various cities in 2012 and 2013.⁸⁴ Additionally, the United States holds significant influence on the world stage and has steered

⁸¹ Damian Lilly et al., "The UN's Response to the Human Rights Crisis after the Coup in Myanmar: Destined to Fail?," International Peace Institute, November 9, 2022, <https://www.ipinst.org/2021/06/un-response-to-human-rights-crisis-after-coup-in-myanmar>.

⁸² Damian Lilly et al., "The UN's Response to the Human Rights Crisis after the Coup in Myanmar: Destined to Fail?," International Peace Institute, November 9, 2022, <https://www.ipinst.org/2021/06/un-response-to-human-rights-crisis-after-coup-in-myanmar>.

⁸³ ANDREW SELTH, "Burma's Muslims and the War on Terror," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27, no. 2 (2004): pp. 107-126, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100490275094>.

⁸⁴ *ibid*

how other countries understand this conflict. For example, the current Biden administration has made calls on the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to do more and pushed for the current Myanmar regime to be isolated.⁸⁵ Following this, leaders from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore all effectively persuaded the ASEAN organization to exclude Myanmar's junta leader from the 2021 ASEAN summit.⁸⁶

It is important to note that it is not only diplomats and the UN who have applied these double standards due to the hierarchical powers at play but other factors like social media and news reporters/agencies have also been displaying this hypocrisy. Just one week after Russia invaded Ukraine, media commentators had been portraying the urgent message that white European lives in Ukraine are more important than others and that Ukraine is the tragedy of the times, completely ignoring the existing conflicts and war-torn nations like Myanmar, Yemen, Syria, and Gaza.⁸⁷ This stark hypocrisy was brought to the forefront of the discussion on social media when a report from the US news agency, CBS News, commented on Ukraine, saying, "This is not Iraq or Syria, this is a civilized and European country."⁸⁸ This statement encompasses the inherent racist rhetoric that war and instability are only associated with "uncivilized" nations instead of the more "advanced, progressive and civilized" western countries. This connects back to the roots of colonialism and how it has shaped the rest of the world's outlook on "developing" nations, which are also the nations that still feel the effects of colonial rule. Furthermore, it would be fair to conclude that the ideologies of global powers like

⁸⁵ Zachary Abuza, "U.S. Policy toward Myanmar's Military Junta," War on the Rocks, November 5, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/11/u-s-policies-for-ending-myanmars-military-rule/>.

⁸⁶ Zachary Abuza, "U.S. Policy toward Myanmar's Military Junta," War on the Rocks, November 5, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/11/u-s-policies-for-ending-myanmars-military-rule/>.

⁸⁷ Ameena Azeem, "A Political Inquiry into Double Standards and the Puzzle of Common Humanity," Scholarship@Western, 2022, https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalscience_maresearchpapers/20/.

⁸⁸ Peter Osborne, "Let's Call out the West's Bias over Ukraine for What It Is - Blatant Racism," Middle East Eye, 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/russia-ukraine-war-media-bias-west-blatant-racism>.

the United States and their influence on narratives have exacerbated sectarian conflict in Myanmar and consequently failed to address the human rights abuses being committed.

Sovereignty and the Rohingya Crisis

Sovereignty can be observed through Myanmar's position within the UN, in which sovereignty is not upheld. There is no current recognized representative for Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) in the international community, which as a result, prevents actions and perpetuates the continuance of human rights abuses against Myanmar refugees. In December 2021, the UN announced that it had deferred a decision on Myanmar's representation. Human rights advocates claim that this failure has hindered international responses to the declining situation and heightens the risk of legitimizing the coup regime. Consequently, Myanmar's NUG, created by the democratically elected politicians removed from office during the 2021 military coup, is calling for official recognition at the 77th United Nations General Assembly.⁸⁹

Various people have spoken out against the unfair representation of the Myanmar people within the UN. The NUG's representative in Australia, Dr. Tun-Aung Shwe, stated in Al Jazeera, "The international community must provide support to the National Unity Government which is the true representative body of the people of Myanmar."⁹⁰ The military junta should not represent the Myanmar people at the UN since the Myanmar people credit the NUG as their primary representative body. The Myanmar Accountability Project stated, "There have been serious inconsistencies in the handling of this issue by different UN bodies, with some allowing the military junta to represent Myanmar, while most have not allowed anyone to sit in

⁸⁹ MC, Ali. "Who Represents Myanmar? Un Faces Credentials Pressure at Assembly." United Nations News | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, September 16, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/16/who-represents-myanmar-un-faces-credentials-pressure-at-assembly>.

⁹⁰ Ibid

Myanmar's seat."⁹¹ These discrepancies continue to provide legitimacy to an organization that does not represent the Myanmar people and must be resolved to mitigate the misrepresentation and the growing crisis. Additionally, the discrepancies convey the impression to the junta that they will not be condemned for its crimes and denies the NUG the necessary support to progress Myanmar's government towards a path of democracy, justice, and human rights.⁹²

The NUG claims they will appear before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to represent Myanmar in dealing with the genocide charges against the Rohingya in 2017, demonstrating the party's willingness to commit to international law and participate in the international community. However, currently, the military is acting for Myanmar at the ICJ, portraying an apparent disconnect between the needs of the people and the goals of the state, thus furthering this confusion and corruption. These institutional inconsistencies within the UN system are hindering the voices of the Myanmar people at a time when they need it most.

Around four months after the military seized power, the United Nations General Assembly voted to formally condemn the February 1 coup and called for an end to arms dealing with the country, an exceptionally rare step from the international body.⁹³ This vote revealed complicated geopolitics. The UN approved the resolution by a vote of 119 to 1, with 36 countries abstaining.⁹⁴ The resolution additionally urged "all Member States to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar."⁹⁵ However, this nonbinding resolution is unlikely to make any immediate

⁹¹ *ibid*

⁹² Barber, Rebecca. "Addressing Atrocity Crimes at the United Nations General Assembly's 77th Session." *Just Security*, September 21, 2022. <https://www.justsecurity.org/83135/addressing-atrocity-crimes-at-the-united-nations-general-assemblys-77th-session/>.

⁹³ MC, Ali. "Who Represents Myanmar?"

⁹⁴ "Rohingya Refugee Crisis." OCHA, October 3, 2022. <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis#:~:text=As%20of%20October%202022%2C%20over,more%20than%20635%2C000%20Rohingya%20refugee>

⁹⁵ Peters, Cameron. "The UN Condemned Myanmar's Coup. Will That Matter?" *Vox*. *Vox*, June 20, 2021. <https://www.vox.com/2021/6/20/22542370/myanmar-coup-united-nations-un>.

difference in the crisis and cannot impose an arms embargo on the southeast Asian nation bordering Thailand. China and Russia, two of Myanmar's greatest suppliers of weapons, were among the countries who abstained from the vote. Expectedly, the Myanmar military government rejected the resolution and accused the UN of infringing on Myanmar's sovereignty.⁹⁶ Myanmar's UN representation in the international community needs to better represent the people, rather than the military regime, in order to advance the state towards a path of upholding human rights.

Recommendations

Despite the flaws within the UN system, especially regarding the UNSC and legitimate action, the UN can constructively aid the specific Rohingya situation in Myanmar, as well as extend tools that can be used to target the overarching issue of Refugee crises around the world.

The first recommendation proposed by this report is regarding the UN's negotiating power and the actions of individual governments. The UN should aim for free humanitarian aid and access to the Rakhine State in Myanmar, where the Rohingya population is facing numerous human rights abuses, from discriminatory policies and practices to extreme violence and persecution.

We also encourage member states to urge the UN Secretary-General to take up this issue and urge fellow diplomats and UN officials to utilize the word "Rohingya" in public and private spheres. This would help delegitimize the current Myanmar government's stance on the Rohingya people, which attempts to depict them as "illegal" persons. These ongoing policies of impoverishment and discrimination carried out by the Myanmar government should be constituted as crimes against humanity and part of ethnic cleansing. In turn, the international

⁹⁶ Parnini, Syeda Naushin, Mohammad Redzuan Othman, and Amer Saifude Ghazali. "The Rohingya refugee crisis and Bangladesh-Myanmar relations." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 22, no. 1 (2013): 133-146.

community should be pushing for an independent and thorough investigation into the potential violations of international law regarding the treatment of the Rohingya refugees.

The Rohingya crisis demonstrates the need for a total reassessment of the UN's lead in the international response to humanitarian crises. The push for repatriation is practically impossible because of the inhospitable nature of Myanmar for the Rohingya. At this time, the UN's attempt at a resolution does not stand a chance against the constant threat of violence and discrimination furthered by the incumbent military government. Heightened pressure on the military regime must be given increased consideration. A coordinated international response focusing on the military government is essential to help the Rohingya return to their homes.

The Myanmar military needs to be held accountable for the atrocities and crimes against humanity that have been committed against the Rohingya. A consistent problem of the response to the Rohingya crisis has been failed international solidarity. To properly hold the military government accountable for their crimes, UN member-states – under the direction of the UN – should create a coordinated global strategy for accountability. The Myanmar military junta should be denied access to imported weapons, finances, and legitimacy to counter their ability to commit atrocities.

The UNSC should impose an arms embargo on the junta. This means that countries like China, Russia, Serbia, and India must be prohibited from sending weapons to Myanmar's military. The embargo needs to be comprehensive; the junta should have zero access to any weapons. The junta is murdering people with weapons from the global market without UN intervention, and these actions are seemingly endorsed by the international community. The Security Council has issued statements motioning for the junta to cease all acts of violence and

human rights violations.⁹⁷ The junta has openly disregarded any form of action from the UNSC, leading to an increased need for more decisive action from the Council, hence the value of instituting an arms embargo. Placing an arms embargo on the junta would create a precedent for future regimes that take over nations and commit crimes against humanity. An arms embargo could compel states to improve their behavior and foster greater international peace and security through the prevention of armed conflict. If this recommendation were implemented, the military capabilities of the junta would be constrained, saving the lives of many innocent individuals.

Developing a more profound understanding of the human cost of war, violence, and persecution through refugee stories and experiences provides societies with a powerful tool to “put a face on the numbers” and highlights important issues of “disruption, stress, and loss associated with being displaced.”⁹⁸ However, despite the importance of refugee crises, international actors and states continue to treat refugees as outside of their responsibility. Appeals for international humanitarian aid are ignored, and displaced people continue to suffer. Globally, twenty-one million people have been forced to seek sanctuary abroad since 2019 and because the UN cannot undo state sovereignty, nor can they ask states to be less secure by decreasing border control funds, it would be beneficial for the UN to provide financial incentives for neighboring countries of those in crisis to accept displaced individuals.

There is a desperate and urgent need for a call to action, and the proposed solutions could benefit the international community and prevent the degradation of the crisis. The crisis in Myanmar is one of many and will not be the last if measures from the international community are not put in place to mitigate future refugee crises.

⁹⁷ Fortify Rights. “U.N. Security Council: Take Urgent Action Against Myanmar Military Junta”. December 07, 2021. <https://www.fortifyrights.org/mya-inv-2021-12-06/>

⁹⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Teaching about Refugees.” UNHCR. UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency. Accessed November 21, 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/teaching-about-refugees.html>.

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CLIMATE CHANGE CASE STUDY
Floods in Pakistan and Germany

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List of Acronyms:

ADB – Asian Development Bank

COP – Conference of the Parties

COR – Club of Rome

ECOSOC – Economic and Social Council

EU – European Union

GA – General Assembly

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

NGO – Non-Governmental Organizations

P5 – Permanent Five

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

UNEP – United Nations Environmental Programme

UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

WWA - World Weather Attribution

COR – Club of Rome

Mission Statement

Our Common Agenda (OCA) identifies climate change as the most urgent crisis that the world faces and it is a challenge that we can only address together. This case study will explore how the vulnerabilities of two regions compare when faced with extreme climate disasters. The floods in Pakistan in 2022 and Germany in 2021 will be used to examine the multidimensional problems nations face when working towards the vision of climate action.

Historical Analysis

The evolution of climate change research is critical in understanding what solutions can be applied to tackle this global phenomenon. The interdisciplinary study of social-ecological systems is a relevant phenomenon that has gained interest from businesspeople, politicians, and scientists alike in the 21st century. However, this newfound attention should be attributed to some of the earliest efforts made back in the 1970s by the Club of Rome (COR) committee. The COR committee is an informal organization of intellectuals who first recognized foreseeable issues caused by climate change and raised their concerns on the world stage.⁹⁹ This committee pioneered climate change research using the “The Limits to Growth” report.¹⁰⁰ In 1972, the COR committee used a computer model to explore world development across two centuries, beginning in 1900 and ending in 2100.¹⁰¹ The report discussed twelve different scenarios that suggested possible environmental outcomes.¹⁰² Their findings concluded that in a “long-term equilibrium state, the relative levels of population and capital, and their relationships to fixed constraints such as land, freshwater, and mineral resources would have to be set so there would be enough food and material production to maintain everyone.”¹⁰³ To achieve this long-term equilibrium, the Brundtland Report was a follow-up document published in 1984, coining the term “sustainable development.”¹⁰⁴ The Brundtland Report explained how “development [should] meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own

⁹⁹ Peter C. Bishop, “The Limits to Growth:” A Report for The Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind,” (2006), 1204.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Schubert Andras, and Istvan Lang, “The Literature Aftermath Of The Brundtland Report ‘Our Common Future’ . A Scientometric Study Based On Citations In Science And Social Science Journals,” *Environment, Development and Sustainability* vol. 7, no. 1 (2005): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-003-0177-5>.

needs.”¹⁰⁵ This report revealed an ongoing trend highlighting the vulnerability humanity faces due to planetary limitations and the need to take immediate action.¹⁰⁶ To address these concerns, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment was developed as a conceptual framework explaining that ecosystems are projected to collapse if complacency persists.¹⁰⁷ The inability to sustain the growth of the earth’s human population and the expansion of consumption would be the two primary causes of the collapse.¹⁰⁸ This case study shows this using quantitative data and comparing the vulnerabilities experienced during the floods in Pakistan and Germany.

Case Study

According to the World Health Organization, the 2022 floods in Pakistan were the most catastrophic natural disaster the country has ever faced.¹⁰⁹ In October, more than 1,600 people died, and nearly 33 million people were impacted.¹¹⁰ In the Indus Valley provinces, Sindh and Balochistan, town centers and villages were submerged, and livestock and crops were washed away.¹¹¹ The floods destroyed the livelihood of 16 percent of the Pakistani population and devastated the entire national economy.¹¹² According to satellite images, flood water inundated

¹⁰⁵ Ralf, Barkemeyer, Diane Holt, Lutz Preuss, and Stephen Tsang, “What Happened to the ‘Development’ in Sustainable Development? Business Guidelines Two Decades After Brundtland,” *Sustainable Development* (Bradford, West Yorkshire, England) vol. 22, no. 1 (2014): 15–32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.521>.

¹⁰⁶ Graham M. Turner, “A comparison of The Limits to Growth with 30 years of reality,” *Global environmental change* 18, no. 3 (2008): 397-411.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen R. Carpenter, Harold A. Mooney, John Agard, Doris Capistrano, Ruth S. DeFries, Sandra Díaz, Thomas Dietz et al, “Science for managing ecosystem services: Beyond the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106, no. 5 (2009): 1305-1312.

¹⁰⁸ Stephen R. Carpenter, Harold A. Mooney, John Agard, Doris Capistrano, Ruth S. DeFries, Sandra Díaz, Thomas Dietz et al, “Science for managing ecosystem services: Beyond the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106, no. 5 (2009): 1305-1312.

¹⁰⁹ Kathleen Magramo, “A Third of Pakistan is underwater amid its worst floods in history. Here’s what you need to know,” *CNN World*. September 22, 2022. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/02/asia/pakistan-floods-climate-explainer-intl-hnk/index.html>.

¹¹⁰ Nazish Brohi, “One Nation Under Water,” *the Atlantic*, October 6th, 2022. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/10/pakistan-flood-cop27-climate-change/671664/>.

¹¹¹ Bhamani S., “Record flooding in Pakistan poses major health risks”, *BMJ* 2022;378:o2148, doi:10.1136/bmj.o2148.

¹¹² Friederike E. L. Otto et al., *Climate change likely increased extreme monsoon rainfall, flooding highly vulnerable communities in Pakistan*, (London: World Weather Attribution, 14 September, 2022,) 4, <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/wp-content/uploads/Pakistan-floods-scientific-report.pdf>. .

18 percent of Sindh province in August alone, blocking access in three-quarters of the area.¹¹³

This obstruction gravely halted the refugee movement and impaired resource mobility.

Additionally, as Sindh is the agricultural heartland of Pakistan, it accounts for most of the rice production and contributes significantly to cotton and sugarcane production.¹¹⁴ The floods ravaged Sindh's entire agricultural industry, resulting in a direct loss of USD 1.30 billion (rice: \$543 million, cotton: \$485 million, and sugarcane: \$273 million).¹¹⁵ On top of the direct economic loss, floods killed 42,174 livestock animals, adding another USD 13 million.¹¹⁶ In total, the 2022 floods resulted in the loss of USD 1.7 billion in Pakistan's economic production. After visiting the country, UN Secretary-General António Guterres claimed that rebuilding the country would cost the Pakistani government USD 33 billion.¹¹⁷ Without external aid, it will be impossible for Pakistan to rebuild to the country's pre-flood conditions.

Climate change-induced natural disasters like floods have a detrimental effect on a country's economy, as exhibited by the case of Pakistan. The flooding directly resulted from unprecedented extreme monsoon rainfall in early summer.¹¹⁸ The situation was worsened by "shorter spikes of very heavy rain" in August.¹¹⁹ Recently, the Sindh and Balochistan provinces have been experiencing a 75 percent increase in intense rainfall due to the 1.2°C global temperature increase.¹²⁰ Global warming caused by climate change can be identified as the primary driver for the large increase in precipitation. Pakistan's geographic location makes the

¹¹³ Ibid. 3.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 18.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 18.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ "Pakistan floods caused nearly \$30 bn economic loss: UN Chief Guterres," *Business Standard*, September 9, 2022. . https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/pakistan-floods-caused-nearly-30-bn-economic-loss-un-chief-guterres-122090901318_1.html.

¹¹⁸ Otto et al., *Climate change likely increased extreme monsoon rainfall*, 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 2.

country one of the most at-risk nations to be exposed to climate extremes. Pakistan is in a region that receives monsoon rains from the Indian Ocean in the summer and westerly disturbances from the Mediterranean Sea during the winter.¹²¹ The two bodies of water, depending heavily on the temperature difference in the atmosphere, are significantly impacted by climate change, which can raise water levels.¹²² Additionally, the areas most affected by flooding are rural. Making up 26 percent of Pakistan's total GDP, the agricultural sector in the Indus Valley accounts for nearly 90 percent of national food production, and account.¹²³ Being highly vulnerable to climate change, it would be expected that Pakistan has created measures of defense to prepare for unpredictable natural disasters. However, this is not the case, as Pakistan has few resources and low readiness to respond to climate challenges.¹²⁴

On the other hand, the flooding in Germany in 2021 is an example of the different capacities a developed nation has when responding to natural disasters. Between the 12th and the 15th of July 2021, extreme rainfall caused severe floods in Europe, which had a particularly devastating impact on Germany. The flooding resulted in at least 184 casualties in Germany and severely affected Germany's public infrastructure, including its residential buildings, roads, bridges, and railways.¹²⁵ The flooding also incurred an estimated damage of EUR 33 billion for Germany alone, making it the state's single most expensive natural disaster to date.¹²⁶ Studies conducted by scientists from the World Weather Attribution (WWA) have accredited the cause

¹²¹ Ibid. 11.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid. 31

¹²⁴ Ibid. 11.

¹²⁵ Mohr, S. et al., A multi-disciplinary analysis of the exceptional flood event of July 2021 in central Europe. Part 1: Event description and analysis, Nat. Hazards Earth Syst. Sci. Discuss. <https://doi.org/10.5194/nhess-2022-137>, in review, 2022. 1.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

of these floods to be directly linked to climate change.¹²⁷ These scientists concluded that climate change drastically impacts the likeliness of heavy precipitation events in the future, predicting a higher frequency of disastrous weather in Europe if nothing changes.¹²⁸ These findings are confirmed by the 6th Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment report, paralleling the thought of the scientists from WWA and expressing the urgency for action to prevent global warming from reaching 2°C.¹²⁹

While the consequences of the floods in Germany were certainly devastating, they highlight the disproportionate effects of climate change between the Global North and South, both in immediate and lasting impacts. In Germany, although it was not easy to obtain accurate data on the exact number of individuals displaced, one article published by *Deutsche Welle* does report data in the worst-hit region of Ahr Valley.¹³⁰ The region is home to 56,000 people, where roughly 42,000 people were affected.¹³¹ From this number, 17,000 people in the region struggled with damages to their homes and possible relocation, and 130 were killed.¹³² Though these are startling figures, it is clear when comparing this data to Pakistan that the infrastructure and preventative measures put in effect by Germany tremendously influenced outcomes. Germany's adaptation measures, along with the help of relief organizations and the German army, prevented

¹²⁷ Kreienkamp, F., et. al., "Heavy Rainfall Which Led to Severe Flooding in Western Europe Made More Likely by Climate Change," World Weather Attribution, August 23, 2021, <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/heavy-rainfall-which-led-to-severe-flooding-in-western-europe-made-more-likely-by-climate-change/>, 32.

¹²⁸ Kreienkamp, F., et. Al.: "Heavy Rainfall Which Led to Severe Flooding in Western Europe Made More Likely by Climate Change," World Weather Attribution, August 23, 2021, <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/heavy-rainfall-which-led-to-severe-flooding-in-western-europe-made-more-likely-by-climate-change/>, 32.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁰ Natalie Muller and Neil King, "After the Flood: Rebuild or Relocate? – DW – 11/15/2021," dw.com (Deutsche Welle, November 15, 2021), <https://www.dw.com/en/climate-change-flooding-germany-dernau-rebuilding-homes/a-59640272>.

¹³¹ Natalie Muller and Neil King, "After the Flood: Rebuild or Relocate? – DW – 11/15/2021," dw.com (Deutsche Welle, November 15, 2021), <https://www.dw.com/en/climate-change-flooding-germany-dernau-rebuilding-homes/a-59640272>.

¹³² Ibid.,

the remaining 12,000 people in the Ahr Valley from experiencing the flood's devastation.¹³³ The total death toll from the German flood was 184 individuals.¹³⁴ Though not to undermine this tragic loss, it is important to objectively compare this numerical value to the death toll in Pakistan, which crossed the 1,300 mark.¹³⁵ While Pakistan faced low readiness to respond, the German government immediately approved a EUR 470 million relief package for flood victims (EUR 11,000 – 15,000 per individual).¹³⁶ Other available funds were also set aside by the German government to reconstruct the nation where the damage took place.¹³⁷ On the other hand, the displaced persons of Pakistan do not have the same level of access to governmental support. The Pakistani government announced that it had no available funds for a relief package for those displaced by the flood.¹³⁸ While the United Nations' humanitarian aid amounted to USD 816 million, it only averaged about USD 25 per person for the 33 million displaced persons.¹³⁹ As demonstrated by Germany and Pakistan, developed and developing countries differ drastically in their capacities to respond to a global climate crisis.

¹³³ "Hope Following the Catastrophe," deutschland.de, December 18, 2021, <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/environment/catastrophic-flooding-in-germany-rebuilding-in-the-ahr-valley#:~:text=The%20Ahr%20Valley%20is%20home,belongings%20or%20suffered%20considerable%20damage.&text=A%20massive%20amount%20of%20state,valley%20immediately%20after%20the%20flooding.>

¹³⁴ Natalie Muller and Neil King, "After the Flood: Rebuild or Relocate? – DW – 11/15/2021," dw.com (Deutsche Welle, November 15, 2021), <https://www.dw.com/en/climate-change-flooding-germany-dernau-rebuilding-homes/a-59640272>.

¹³⁵ Abid Hussain, "Death toll in devastating Pakistan floods crosses 1,300 mark." *Al Jazeera*. September 5, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/5/death-toll-in-devastating-pakistan-floods-crosses-1300>.

¹³⁵ Abid Hussain, "Death toll in devastating Pakistan floods crosses 1,300 mark." *Al Jazeera*. September 5, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/5/death-toll-in-devastating-pakistan-floods-crosses-1300>.

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¹³⁶ "Flood-Battered Germany Rolls out \$470m Relief Package," *Al Jazeera*, July 21, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/21/flood-battered-germany-rolls-out-470m-relief-package>.

¹³⁷ "Flood-Battered Germany Rolls out \$470m Relief Package," *Al Jazeera*, July 21, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/21/flood-battered-germany-rolls-out-470m-relief-package>.

¹³⁸ Asif Shahzad, "Pakistan out of Money for Flood Recovery, UN Boosts Aid Request- Minister," Reuters, October 4, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-says-no-space-give-economy-any-stimulus-2022-10-04/>.

¹³⁹ Asif Shahzad, "Pakistan out of Money for Flood Recovery, UN Boosts Aid Request- Minister," Reuters, October 4, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-says-no-space-give-economy-any-stimulus-2022-10-04/>.

In addition to this difference, it is also important to note a fundamental lack of accountability measures in place that correspond with the emissions produced by nations. Natural disasters like floods correlate with the emissions produced by countries. However, the injustice presented is that many developed nations are the culprits for producing the most greenhouse gases yet are the most prepared to face climate consequences. For instance, the United States is responsible for 11 percent of the world's greenhouse gases.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, countries like Pakistan, which only produces 0.72 percent of total world emissions, face the brunt of climate disasters.¹⁴¹ This is deeply concerning given that many developing nations in the same position as Pakistan must wait to deal with climate-induced natural disasters while developed countries reap the economic benefits. Developed countries like Germany or the United States already have available measures such as early warning systems, better rescue equipment, and disaster relief funds.¹⁴² Thus, a developed nation like Germany is far better equipped to respond to natural disasters even when caught off-guard by events such as the floods. Germany acted swiftly, commencing rescue operations and dispersing emergency relief packages. Meanwhile, Pakistan suffers on a much greater scale, given its lack of disaster-relief equipment and available emergency funds. Hence, the discrepancy in responsiveness is further exacerbated by developed nations refusing to be held accountable for their gross emissions to equalize the playing field.

Connection to Colonialism, Hierarchy, and Sovereignty

¹⁴⁰ "Report: China emissions exceed all developed nations combined," BBC World News, May 7, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-57018837>.

¹⁴¹ Erum Abdul Razzak, "Greenhouse Gas Emission In Pakistan," Daily Times, April 17, 2019, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/377839/greenhouse-gas-emission-in-pakistan/>.

¹⁴² Marcelo Giugale, "Time to Insure Developing Countries Against Natural Disasters," World Bank, October 11, 2017, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2017/10/11/time-to-insure-developing-countries-against-natural-disasters>.

We can connect our case studies of floods in Pakistan in 2022 and Germany in 2021 to the overarching issues of colonialism, sovereignty, and hierarchy in the United Nations system. Colonialism is the root cause responsible for generating inequalities in the international order. Former colonies in the Global South have been grouped into lower-income and developing countries. As previously illustrated, developing countries contribute less to climate change than developed countries because they do not have highly industrialized economies. The historical presence of colonialism in these nations can explain this lack of industrialization. Pakistan's infrastructure can be used as a basis to showcase this. The natural drainage of the Indus River contains artificial embankments that British engineers built during colonization.¹⁴³ Like other colonial projects at the time, the British developments were exploitative in nature. The colonists dismissed the locals' view on the river, who considered the Indus a living being and instead deemed it a commercial entity to exploit.¹⁴⁴ The colonists constructed dams, factories, and hydro-infrastructures using past hydrological statistics.¹⁴⁵ At the time, the British engineers believed that the water level would remain fixed, with only occasional deviations.¹⁴⁶ Once the East India Company and the British Empire had left Pakistan, their departure also drained about USD 45 trillion out of the Pakistan economy in the form of resources.¹⁴⁷ Accordingly, the Pakistani government was forced to keep this infrastructural project due to its lack of available funds. As climate change has worsened over the years, the water cycle has become less predictable, directly affecting the British-built embankments. These structures interrupted the

¹⁴³ Daanish Mustafa, "Opinion: Pakistan must get rid of colonial mindset on water," *The Third Pole*. September 9, 2022, <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/livelihoods/opinion-pakistan-must-get-rid-of-colonial-mindset-on-water/>.

¹⁴⁴ Mustafa, Daanish, "Opinion: Pakistan must get rid of colonial mindset on water," *The Third Pole*. September 9, 2022. <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/livelihoods/opinion-pakistan-must-get-rid-of-colonial-mindset-on-water/>.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Hasnanin Javed, "The Economic Cost of Colonialism," *Daily Times*, September 22, 2022, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/1000943/the-economic-cost-of-colonialism/>.

natural flow, leading to water overflowing and floods intensifying after extreme monsoon rainfall.¹⁴⁸ Continuing to perceive the river as a resource for exploitation will aggravate the situation. To prevent future climate-induced tragedies, countries must decolonize their relationship with nature and industrialize based on the needs of their own country.

Resource extraction has also been an issue brought about by colonialism, which has prevented many countries in the Global South from initiating their development like their Northern counterparts. When looking at Pakistan (formally a part of India, which was a British colony), mercantilist economic policy was the driving factor for depleting the country's resources. The East India Company came to exercise quasi-colonial control in the 18th and early 19th centuries, maximizing India's plantation industry to produce tea, indigo, and coffee.¹⁴⁹ For this reason, countries with a history of colonialism have limitations on their ability to achieve a long-lasting relationship with nature as the land is still striving to replenish itself. While developed nations can undergo rapid industrialization, developing nations are still recovering from their colonial scars. A group of scientists from the UK who specialize in sustainability studies has stated that to halt climate disparities, countries need to have the collective goal of intergenerational equity to promote environmental resource management.¹⁵⁰

The term "intergenerational equity" refers to the need to "hold the natural environment of our planet in common with other species, other people, and with past, present, and future

¹⁴⁸ Mustafa, Daanish, "Opinion: Pakistan must get rid of colonial mindset on water," *The Third Pole*. September 9, 2022. <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/livelihoods/opinion-pakistan-must-get-rid-of-colonial-mindset-on-water/>.

¹⁴⁹ Matthew Lange, James Mahoney, and Matthias Vom Hau, "Colonialism and development: A comparative analysis of Spanish and British colonies," *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1412-1462.

¹⁵⁰ Ralf Barkemeyer, Diane Holt, Lutz Preuss, and Stephen Tsang, "What Happened to the 'Development' in Sustainable Development? Business Guidelines Two Decades After Brundtland," *Sustainable Development* 22, no. 1 (2014): 15–32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.521>.

generations.”¹⁵¹ In this framework, a country’s economic growth can coincide with improvements to the well-being of individuals.¹⁵² In an idealized world, this is a vision that each country should aspire to achieve. The issue that arises from this vision is when countries in the Global North approach intergenerational equity using a colonial mindset. A newly adopted term by Guillaume Blanc describes this mindset as “green” colonialism. This refers to Western nations attempting to “save” the wildlife and landscapes of developing countries under the guise of sustainable development.¹⁵³ While these intentions may appear benevolent, their actual effects only serve to hurt marginalized groups like Indigenous people. This process involves “turning territories into national parks, banning agriculture in these areas, evicting people from their homes, and getting rid of their fields to supposedly create a natural world.”¹⁵⁴ In this manner, the resources that would have been used by the developing country for industrialization become unusable resources. Therefore, colonial control over former colonies persists as colonialists continue to influence developing countries’ economic development.

The Westphalian conception of sovereignty also affects climate change. Sovereignty highlights territorial boundaries.¹⁵⁵ But climate change is a global phenomenon that affects everyone in the world and occurs in every region, state, and continent. The consequences of climate change occur regardless of territorial boundaries and thus challenge Westphalian

¹⁵¹ Ralf Barkemeyer, Diane Holt, Lutz Preuss, and Stephen Tsang, “What Happened to the ‘Development’ in Sustainable Development? Business Guidelines Two Decades After Brundtland,” *Sustainable Development* 22, no. 1 (2014): 15–32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.521>.

¹⁵² Ralf Barkemeyer, Diane Holt, Lutz Preuss, and Stephen Tsang, “What Happened to the ‘Development’ in Sustainable Development? Business Guidelines Two Decades After Brundtland,” *Sustainable Development* 22 no. 1 (2014): 15–32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.521>.

¹⁵³ Ed Stoddard, “The Invention of Green Colonialism – the roots of Africa’s wildlife NGOs come under withering scrutiny,” *Land Portal*, June 14, 2022, <https://landportal.org/node/102593#:~:text=It%20is%20a%20%E2%80%9Cprocess%20which,in%20which%20people%20are%20absent%E2%80%9D>.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Natalie, Muller, and Neil King, “After the Flood: Rebuild or Relocate?,” *Deutsche Welle*, November 15, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/climate-change-flooding-germany-dernau-rebuilding-homes/a-59640272>.

sovereignty. As observed in the floods of Pakistan in 2022 and Germany in 2021, climate change-induced flooding occurred on two different continents. However, these respective countries faced similar outcomes, such as death, displacement, and extreme damage to infrastructure and houses. Natural disasters transcend borders, meaning that the effects of these floods were not limited to Pakistan and Germany but also surrounding countries. In 2021, for instance, extreme flooding took place in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate, which borders France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, affecting them as well.¹⁵⁶ The 2022 flooding in Pakistan was caused by heavy monsoon rainfall, which also affected parts of India.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, the outdated Westphalian definition of sovereignty needs to be questioned to enable collective action addressing climate change.

Furthermore, nations prioritize their own territorial interests when participating in global climate negotiations, upholding the principle of sovereignty dictated by non-intervention. This has resulted in certain states not agreeing with other states' stances regarding climate action. For example, COP 15 and 16 ended with tensions between nations over 'unrealistic' carbon reduction targets.¹⁵⁸ Even if states agree to a set of conditions, the question remaining is how to ensure states follow through with their promise. Most recently, the United States was called out for falling behind on previous promises to help developing nations with adaptation plans and transitioning to cleaner energy.¹⁵⁹ In 2021, Senate Democrats had promised to secure USD 3.1

¹⁵⁶ "Deadly flooding, heatwaves in Europe, highlight urgency of climate action," UN News, July 16, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1096012>.

¹⁵⁷ Shih-Yu Wang, Robert E. Davies, Wan-Ru Huang, and Robert R. Gillies, "Pakistan's two-stage monsoon and links with the recent climate change," *Journal of Geographical Research* 116 (2011): 1-15, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1029/2011JD015760>.

¹⁵⁸ Andrew Paul Kythreotis, "Progress in global climate change politics? Reasserting national state territoriality in a 'post-political' world," *Progress in Human Geography* 36, no. 4 (2012): 457, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03>.

¹⁵⁹ Nadja Popovich, and Brad Plumer, "Who has the Most Historical Responsibility for Climate Change?," *New York Times*, November 12, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/11/12/climate/cop26-emissions-compensation.html>.

billion for climate financing, but this vision fell short as only USD 1 billion was secured in 2022.¹⁶⁰ As mentioned, climate change transcends national boundaries, which challenges sovereignty. States should be less narrow-interested in pursuing national agendas and focus more on collectively creating more equitable climate change policies and holding themselves accountable.¹⁶¹

Although climate change affects everyone, everywhere, it impacts developing and developed countries disproportionately due to economic inequality and the availability of resources. In low-income developing countries, there is a low level of climate adaptation and a lack of resources, capacity, and infrastructure. Thus, developing nations are more vulnerable to extreme climate disasters like floods.¹⁶² The flood damages and economic losses in Pakistan totaled over USD 30 billion and have affected their agricultural industry with spillover effects in external trade and services sectors.¹⁶³ However, according to the World Bank, the country has limited fiscal and public resources and cannot recover independently.¹⁶⁴ They will need support from the international community beyond the aid provided by the ADB, EU, UNDP, and World Bank if the Pakistani government is to have the means to recover from the natural disaster and implement climate adaptations.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, the effects of climate change are not as severe in high-income, developed countries because of available resources and strong infrastructure. The government of Germany supported victims of the floods with aid packages

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Kythreotis, "Progress in global climate change politics?," 458.

¹⁶² Marcus Taylor, "Climate Change and Development," In *The Essential Guide to Critical Development Studies*, Ed. Henry Veltmeyer and Paul Bowles (London: Routledge, 2021), 311, <https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.4324/9781003037187>.

¹⁶³ World Bank, "Pakistan: Flood Damages and Economic Losses Over USD 30 billion and Reconstruction Needs Over USD 16 billion – New Assessment," October 28, 2022. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/10/28/pakistan-flood-damages-and-economic-losses-over-usd-30-billion-and-reconstruction-needs-over-usd-16-billion-new-assessme>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

worth EUR 400 million, whereas Pakistan has yet to announce any relief package.¹⁶⁶ Hence, hierarchy in the international system affects how and whether states can recover from environmental disasters.

There is also a hierarchy of interests in global climate negotiations, where certain states have low vulnerability and high contributions to climate change, while others have high vulnerability and low contributions. Accordingly, states with high vulnerability would have more interest in containing climate change, and low vulnerability states will have less interest. This difference in interest can lead to not being immediately concerned with an agreement or even withdrawing from the negotiations, which would disrupt the objective of international cooperation.¹⁶⁷ For instance, the US, Canada, Japan, and Russia withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol commitments.¹⁶⁸ Their primary reasons for doing so were due to high climate costs and, at the same time, their lack of concern resulting from having a low vulnerability to climate impacts.¹⁶⁹ In turn, this made the protocol less effective as major players required in the climate action discussion were missing from the table.

Connection to Our Common Agenda

Severe underfunding for adaptation and resilience continues to present an issue not only in the case of Pakistan but also more generally for developing nations. The case studies of the Pakistan floods in 2022 and the Germany floods in 2021 have strong ties to the OCA report. Climate action goals align with the OCA objective of ‘protecting our planet.’¹⁷⁰ This goal consists of more defined targets such as committing to reduced carbon emissions, declaring a

¹⁶⁶ “Flood-Battered Germany Rolls out \$470m Relief Package.” Al Jazeera.

¹⁶⁷ Anu Unny, “Global Climate Change Negotiations and Interest-Based Positioning of Countries,” *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs* 24, no. 2 (2020): 61, [https://doi.org/10.6185/TJIA.V.202010_24\(2\).0002](https://doi.org/10.6185/TJIA.V.202010_24(2).0002).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁷⁰ United Nations Secretary General, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General* (New York: United Nations, 2021), 6.

climate emergency and a right to a healthy environment, package of support to developing countries and action by the GA on territorial threats of climate change, and prevent, protect, and resolve situations of environmental displacements.¹⁷¹ The report argues that without a fundamental shift in environmental protection, targets related to climate change cannot be achieved.¹⁷² Additionally, our climate and environment should be protected for everyone, everywhere, now and in the future, by helping populations, infrastructures, economies, and societies be resilient to the effects of climate change.¹⁷³

The three themes of colonialism, sovereignty and hierarchy highlighted in this report also directly parallel the values of OCA. The intention of OCA was to have a formal document expressing the concerns over the need to build trust by working collaboratively. This touches on OCA's first objective, which was 'leaving no one behind.'¹⁷⁴ This measure can be said to be the disciplinary action to tackle the three themes. Climate change is a global issue experienced in different forms depending on which issue (colonialism, sovereignty, or hierarchy) it is categorized under. However, what all these issues have in common is the inequality and injustices presented. As Pakistan's foreign minister had stated, "What we seek is not charity, not alms, not aid – but justice."¹⁷⁵ As an international governing body, the UN has promised to protect its member states. But when countries like the United States are falling behind on previously made promises to aid less developed countries adapt to climate threats, the vision to

¹⁷¹ United Nations Secretary General, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General* (New York: United Nations, 2021), 6.

¹⁷² Ibid., 34.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷⁵ Raymond Zhong, "In a First Study of Pakistan's Floods, Scientists See Climate Change at Work," New York Times, September 15, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/15/climate/pakistan-floods-global-warming.htm>

success dwindles.¹⁷⁶ Thus, the collective body of nations must recognize the urgency in acting immediately and collectively work towards solving the issue of climate change.

Recommendations

1. Forming appropriate organizations to oversee the application of the Loss and Damage Fund

To address the remnants of colonialism that continue to hinder collective actions in combating climate change, the international community must commit to changing the inequality of the current global system. The Pakistan and German cases reveal the financial disparity between the Global North and South. As a developed Western country, Germany has more resources to tackle climate-induced natural disasters and achieve intergenerational equity. However, as previously mentioned, climate change is not restricted by man-made borders. Due to their weak economic status, underdeveloped nations tend to experience more devastating impacts from climate change despite their low greenhouse gas emissions. On the contrary, the Western imperial powers gathered most of their wealth through natural exploitation, providing them with a solid economic foundation to alleviate the damage caused by climate change. This unfair system is destructive to global solidarity. To achieve international unity, the wealth gap needs to be narrowed. The recent COP 27 addressed this problem by establishing a Loss and Damage Fund.¹⁷⁷ However, the fund would only consider current carbon emissions, overlooking the cumulative historical greenhouse emissions.¹⁷⁸ Colonialism has created an economic system where countries in the Global South produce commodities for the developed markets in the Global North with cheap labor costs and severe environmental repercussions. Unfortunately,

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ United Nations, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan*. Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt: COP27, 2022.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

such unjust exploitations remain unaddressed in the current UNFCCC deal. The recent COP 27 development is indeed a big step forward, but still incomplete in uprooting the embedded colonialism in the current international system. To completely realize the Loss and Damage Funds' potential in decolonizing our current systems, appropriate organizations should be established to oversee the transition and application of the funds. The newly established organization needs to cooperate closely with other environmentally oriented organizations, such as the UPEP and the UNDP, to push forward initiatives and deals that address historical emissions and Western exploitations. With such a measure in place, the colonial legacy in our international system would be greatly diminished.

2. Cutting national debt to incentivize climate change action

During the 1970s and 1980s, the “Washington Consensus” became the guideline for international capital flow.¹⁷⁹ Major Western financial institutions lent vast amounts of money to developing countries in exchange for market liberalization.¹⁸⁰ Initially, the debts were manageable for developing countries. However, the oil crisis in the 70s-80s forced Western financial institutions to quadruple their interest rates.¹⁸¹ As such, the debt in the Global South expanded exponentially in the following decade. The total debt grew 1,879 percent, from USD 19 billion in 1960 to USD 376 billion by 1979.¹⁸² By 2018, the total debt in the developing world was USD 4 trillion – an amount that would be nearly impossible to pay off.¹⁸³ Defaulting on the cumulative debt would gravely damage a country's international reputation and would thereby be avoided by most countries at all costs. As an alternative measure, the UN could use a portion of

¹⁷⁹ Tim Di Muzio, “Disciplinary Neoliberalism, the Tyranny of Debt and the 1%,” SAGE Handbook of Neoliberalism, 2018: 462.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 463.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 462.

¹⁸² L.S. Stavrianos, *Global Rift: The Third World Comes of Age*, New York: William Morrow and Co, 1981: 127.

¹⁸³ Muzio, “Disciplinary Neoliberalism, the Tyranny of Debt and the 1%,” 462.

its counter-climate change funds to pay off developing countries' standing debt under the conditions that these countries engage in sustainable development initiatives. Similar conducts have been proven effective by NGOs.¹⁸⁴ Adopting this approach by the UN can further promote its applications and reduce the issue of sovereignty by providing developing nations with economic freedom.

3. Reforming the UNSC or circumventing it by addressing the climate change issues in the UNGA or the UNFCCC

To highlight the significance of climate change, countries can raise this issue to the UNSC. However, the deep-rooted hierarchical structure in the council can prevent meaningful actions. The international community can try to reform the dysfunctional institution or circumvent it completely when discussing climate change.

The UN has two options to counter the dominance of the five permanent member states in the Security Council. It can give temporary veto power to the non-permanent member states or grant more power to the task-specific committees. Currently, the ten non-permanent member states are elected according to geographic representation.¹⁸⁵ The new system can bestow overruling power to non-permanent members when discussing security issues in their respective regions. For instance, when discussing the climate-induced refugee crisis in Pakistan, non-permanent representatives would need to reach a unanimous vote to overrule the veto decision. Additionally, the UN can provide opportunities to the sub-committee to question the veto

¹⁸⁴ Anatoly Kurmanaev, "How Belize Cut Its Debt by Fighting Global Warming," *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/07/world/americas/belize-coral-reef-preservation.html>.

¹⁸⁵ UN General Assembly, *Question of equitable representation on the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council*, 17 December 1963, A/RES/1991. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/wmp-a-res-1991a-xviii.php>.

decision of permanent member states when the topic is in their field of expertise. This restrains the permanent member states from abusing the right to veto.

However, this report recognizes the difficulty of reforming a central UN organ, such as the Security Council. If the international community deems it impractical to change the existing structure, it would be futile to raise the topic in an ineffective institution. As such, countries are better off addressing climate change using platforms that have fewer hierarchical problems, such as the UNGA or the UNFCCC. The aforementioned climate change funds established in COP 27 proved the effectiveness of the UNFCCC. Without meaningful reform in the Security Council, countries should circumvent it and address climate change issues on other functional platforms.

4. Incorporating non-western teachings

Decolonization should not just remain at the surface level. Wealth and resource redistribution is only the first step. The case studies highlight the importance of incorporating non-western teachings into the fight against climate change. Our current conception of development is dominated by Western values and ideals, as reinforced by the term “green” colonialism. These values have occupied the ideological high ground since the colonial period and are still present in contemporary applications. Meanwhile, other contending beliefs are deemed backward and inapplicable to present-day global governance. To truly decolonize the international system, the UN must emphasize the importance of non-Western philosophies. To start, the UN could incorporate Indigenous peoples’ organizations into their sustainable developmental projects. Instead of only having a stand-alone organization, such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the UN needs to establish an Indigenous sub-department representing the affected local communities under each ECOSOC subsidiary body.

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SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDY
Structural Adjustment Policies in Ghana

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List of Acronyms:

ECOSOC - Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

EU - European Union

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

HIPC - Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

IMF - International Monetary Fund

OCA - Our Common Agenda

SAL - Structural Adjustment Loan(s)

SAP - Structural Adjustment Program(s)

UN - United Nations

WB - World Bank

Introduction

Sustainable development has been a long-time goal of the United Nations (UN). *Our Common Agenda* (OCA) points to several goals regarding sustainable development, environmental sustainability, and equality. Promoting sustainable development in developing countries has also been an ongoing objective for organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB). However, such development projects have not always been successful due to their Western approaches. This report will use the case of the IMF and WB's influence in Ghana to show how their Western approach to economic development can cause adverse outcomes for states in need. In addition to the case study, this report proposes that the UN take a more culturally relative and pluralistic approach to economic development programmes to ensure that they effectively and sustainably account for each developing state's individual circumstances.

The approach to economic sustainability in the developing world has always dealt with inequalities, especially regarding the involvement of the international community. Most of the reforms they champion are representative of the West but ineffective in the developing world. This inherent inequality is reflected in international economic institutions like the IMF and the WB. The IMF has been characterized as an institution that caters to the West, or more specifically, a de facto institution of the EU.¹⁸⁶ This is due to the institution's close involvement in European crisis management and its constant sympathy towards European financial projects. European countries receive preferential political and economic treatment from the IMF, while developing countries are often discriminated against as similar benefits are withheld.¹⁸⁷ This is due to political imbalances within the institution's structure and practices as Western actors like the EU exert greater influence on decision-making within the IMF.¹⁸⁸ Due to overexerted voting shares, and the overrepresentation of Western-national executives, these actors receive greater authority. This is shown by the financial crisis in East Asia during the late 90s.¹⁸⁹ The IMF is believed to have ignored the measures by regional policymakers, instead imposing unsuitable policy measures that adhered to Western states. Instead of fixing the domestic demand, the IMF suggested that Asian countries tighten their fiscal policy and increase their interest rates to encourage foreign finance.¹⁹⁰ This example is one of many showcasing the inherent bias projected by the IMF.

¹⁸⁶ Dermot Hodson. "The IMF as a de Facto Institution of the EU: A Multiple Supervisor Approach." *Review of International Political Economy* 22, no. 3 (2015): 577. doi:10.1080/09692290.2014.956136.

¹⁸⁷ Phillip Y. Lipsy and Haillie Na-Kyung Lee. "The IMF As a Biased Global Insurance Mechanism: Asymmetrical Moral Hazard, Reserve Accumulation, and Financial Crises." *International Organization* 73, no. 1 (2019): 37. doi:10.1017/S0020818318000371.

¹⁸⁸ Lipsy and Na-Kyung Lee, "The IMF As a Biased Global Insurance Mechanism," 38.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibids.*, 41.

¹⁹⁰ Elaine Hutson and Colm Kearney. "The Asian Financial Crisis and the Role of the IMF: A Survey." *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy* 4, no. 3 (1999): 409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13547869908724690>.

The WB is similar in this regard, as it is also characterized as an institution that reflects Western interests, more notably US interests.¹⁹¹ The institution advocates for neoliberal policies that further reinforce US influence, thus reducing the institution's credibility as being impartial.¹⁹² Due to the WB's prioritization of the US, most countries that have good relations with the US do not push back when receiving funds. This was seen due to the strong correlation between US exports and funds from the WB. The greater the exports a country purchased from the US, the more funds it received from the WB. Therefore, the IMF and the WB do not inherently support partial multilateral policies; instead, they follow Western interests.

In terms of the reforms advocated by the IMF and the WB, they are not representative of the developing regions.¹⁹³ The policies provided by these institutions are relatively simple and orthodox, failing to cater to the needs of the country in question. Consequently, the reforms usually backfire as they do not consider that development is subjective to different countries. Instead, the institutions' involvement in the Global South often results in more disparities than accomplishments.¹⁹⁴ This can be illustrated by the economic liberalization programmes undertaken in Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco. The reforms conducted by the IMF and the WB neglected the social aspect of reform. These reforms, therefore, undermined the social welfare arrangements and safety nets necessary for the countries' economic success.¹⁹⁵ Most of the policies worsened the countries' social development by increasing unemployment, poverty, and income inequality. Therefore, the reforms conducted by the IMF and the WB were

¹⁹¹ Robert K. Fleck and Christopher Kilby. "World Bank Independence: A Model and Statistical Analysis of US Influence." *Review of Development Economics* 10, no 2 (2006): 224. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9361.2006.00314.x>.

¹⁹² Fleck and Kilby, "World Bank Independence," 226.

¹⁹³ Hamed El-Said and Jane Harrigan. "Economic Reform, Social Welfare, and Instability: Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, 1983-2004." *Middle East Journal* 68, no. 1 (2014): 99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43698563>.

¹⁹⁴ El-Said and Harrigan, "Economic Reform, Social Welfare, and Instability," 99.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

unrepresentative and ineffective in the Global South. The very conception of these programmes and policies is not accurately researched in terms of the countries in the South. Instead, a Western form of development is valued and implemented.

The very structure in which the international community operates is disadvantageous to the developing world. Institutions are formulated based on a hierarchical arrangement where the West, with its increased funds and influence, controls the majority of all international organizations. This perpetuates the colonial cycle in which the entire UN system was built, forcing the South to abide by the Westphalian system to achieve development.

Historical Analysis

One of the most contentious issues in African politics since the 1980s has been the impact of stabilization and structural adjustment policies (SAP) required by the IMF and WB as a condition of financial assistance. Structural adjustment aims to improve economic growth, resource allocation, economic efficiency, and resilience through policy and institutional reform.¹⁹⁶ SAPs are designed by the WB and IMF and imposed on debtor countries as a precondition for debt relief, acquiring new loans, and attracting foreign investment.¹⁹⁷ Proponents have hailed Ghana's SAP program as a success, citing an impressive 20 percent rise in real GDP from 1983 through 1986.¹⁹⁸ However, these statistics fail to consider the spatial disparities that have been widened by SAPs.¹⁹⁹ Reducing government spending to the smallest

¹⁹⁶ Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, "An Overview of Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa," in *IMF and World Bank Sponsored Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa*, ed. Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang (London: Routledge, 2001), 1.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹⁸ Reginald Herbold Green, "Structural Adjustment in Ghana," *Food Policy* 13, no. 1 (February 1988): 117, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0306-9192\(88\)90019-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/0306-9192(88)90019-x).

¹⁹⁹ Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, "The Best of Times and the Worst of Times: Structural Adjustment Programmes and Uneven Development in Africa: The Case of Ghana," *The Professional Geographer* 52, no. 3 (August 2000): pp. 469-483, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-0124.00239>, 475.

amount is one of the goals of SAPs.²⁰⁰ In the case of Ghana, social services were among the most affected, with spending on health and education services amounting to less than 5 percent of the national budget between 1983 and 1986.²⁰¹ This trend would continue for years to come, with health spending amounting to only 1.3 percent of the national budget in 1997.²⁰² Before implementing SAPs in 1983, health spending accounted for 7 percent and 10 percent of government expenditure in 1980 and 1982, respectively.²⁰³ The installment of user fees in hospitals as part of SAPs in 1985 led to significant drops in hospital visitation, with rates as high as 45-85 percent in rural areas in the first eight months of the policy's installment.²⁰⁴ As a result of these reforms, health, education, maternal, and child health and welfare suffered immensely. The resulting poverty has also exacerbated malnutrition among children, the elderly, the urban poor, and rural residents. Thus, the implementation of SAPs in Ghana successfully raised the GDP. However, with the rise in GDP came along significant spatial disparities.

In addition to social and economic impacts, SAPs have negatively impacted the environment. As a result of liberalizing measures, mass deforestation has occurred in Ghana.²⁰⁵ For example, between 1980 and 1990, Ghana had the second-highest rate of deforestation in all of West Africa, with the country's highest loss registering at 13,000 km².²⁰⁶ Between 1980 and 1990, the country logged 110 km² annually, to which the WB itself admitted the Ghanaian government lacked a comprehensive and up-to-date policy regarding its forest resources.²⁰⁷ The

²⁰⁰ Konadu-Agyemang, "The Best of Times and the Worst of Times," 475.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 475.

²⁰² Ibid., 476.

²⁰³ Ibid., 476.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 478.

²⁰⁵ Samuel Nii Codjoe and Fred M. Dzanku, "Long-Term Determinants of Deforestation in Ghana: The Role of Structural Adjustment Policies," *African Development Review* 21, no. 3 (December 2009): 560, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8268.2009.00223.x>.

²⁰⁶ Henry Owusu, "Current Convenience, Desperate Deforestation: Ghana's Adjustment program and the Forestry Sector," *The Professional Geographer* 50, no. 4 (1998): 432, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-0124.00130>.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 432.

logging sector exceeded its allowable limit approximately 1.8 to 2.5 times – cutting 1.8 to 2.7 million m³ instead of 1.1 m³.²⁰⁸ These figures and lack of comprehensive policy show that to meet its debt obligations, the Ghanaian government supported mass deforestation practices. As this case study shows, historical SAP programmes have ignored the social and environmental impacts of their policies. The need to service ever-growing amounts of debt has led to the exacerbation of already existing poverty and the mass depletion of natural resources.

Though the IMF abandoned the SAP model in 1999 by replacing it with the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility,²⁰⁹ the effects of historical economic development programmes continue to be felt today. Instead of promoting equitable development that would lift Ghanaian citizens out of poverty, decades of SALs have left Ghana indebted. In 1999, after 16 years of borrowing money from its creditors, Ghana was left with USD 7,510 billion in debt.²¹⁰ This enormous debt placed Ghana among the 41 most indebted countries in the world. In this period, one-third of Ghana's expenditure in debts was owed to the IMF, with the WB and other multilateral organizations based in the G-7 nations receiving more than 70 percent.²¹¹ As of the end of 2021, Ghana's total public debt amounted to USD 54.4 billion.²¹² Of this amount, USD 28.1 billion was external debt owed to creditors like the IMF and WB.²¹³ These figures suggest that instead of promoting sustainable development, economic reform left the Ghanaian government in a position of constant debt servicing.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 432.

²⁰⁹ Sanjeev Gupta et al., "Is the PRFG Living Up to Expectations? An Assessment of Program Design" (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2002), 1-2.

²¹⁰ Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang and Baffour Kwaku Takyi, "Structural Adjustment Programmes and the Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment in Ghana," in *IMF and World Bank Sponsored Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa*, ed. Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang (London: Routledge, 2001), 25.

²¹¹ Ibid., 27.

²¹² Ken Ofori-Atta, *The Annual Public Debt Report for the 2021 Financial Year* (Accra, Ghana: Ministry of Finance, 2021), 14.

²¹³ Ibid., 14.

The legacy of economic reforms in Ghana has left the country dependent on the Western world. Developed countries benefit from the primacy of the IMF and WB as they allow for the promotion of free markets and liberalized trade policies. Western countries benefit directly when WB loans are used for purchasing foreign goods and services. This was the case in 1992 when over 50 percent of the WB's loans were used for this purpose.²¹⁴ Ghana's enormous debts leave the country with very little economic sovereignty. As a result of its debt obligations, Ghana cannot use its earnings to invest in socio-economic programmes. The country will also be forced to exploit an increasing amount of its natural resources to service its debt. The OCA emphasizes the need to rethink the economic systems that assume limitless growth and expansion but in a way that sustains the environment and well-being of all global citizens.²¹⁵ The OCA suggests that measures of progress beyond GDP must be utilized, considering other factors like human welfare, planetary sustainability, and non-market services. Through this approach, we can ensure sustainable economic development.²¹⁶ While the OCA addresses sustainable economic development, nations must go further to create a truly even playing field. To reinvigorate the spirit of multilateralism and trust among nations, the economic reform programmes which bound nations in billions of dollars of debt and limit their economic sovereignty must cease to exist.

The Application of Cultural Relativism and Pluralism

While Ghana is the case study used for this report, it is only one example of the many countries that have been negatively impacted by the effects of economic development programmes launched by the IMF and WB. For this reason, this report proposes a new approach to building and understanding economically sustainable development initiatives. Cultural

²¹⁴ Ibid., 27.

²¹⁵ United Nations, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General* (New York, NY: the United Nations, 2021), 33.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

relativism is a more recent ideology that has entered the international political discourse.

Cultural relativity is a “theoretical doctrine” that states that cultures should be perceived and treated with dignity and respect. Therefore, there is no absolute right or wrong, as each culture interprets things through a different lens.²¹⁷ Concerning sustainable development, this report proposes that the United Nations should adopt a more culturally relative approach toward development policies.

Rather than holding onto one culture or system as a norm on the international stage, this report proposes economic policies that are individually geared to each nation-state in need. While accounting for culture in global development has become more recognized since the 1980s, culture-based approaches have not become the mainstream method for development projects launched by external actors.²¹⁸ Creating a bridge between the two could lead to significant sustainable economic development efforts. Additionally, in cohesion with OCA, this bridge could be used to work towards the sustainable development goals and increase effectiveness in human rights, environmental sustainability, sustainable financing, promoting peace, and leaving no one behind.

Sustainable development can be easily understood in two ways: ecological, with environmental and cultural factors, or expansionist, with intense economic goals and no other considerations.²¹⁹ Historically, powerful countries have taken the colonial expansionist meaning to govern their initiatives, as was the case in Ghana. This ignores the multitudes of worldviews

²¹⁷ David Hollinger, “Cultural Relativism,” in *The Cambridge History of Science*, ed. Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7:709, 716.

²¹⁸ Maider Maraña, “Culture and Development: Evolution and Prospects,” UNESCO Etxea Working Papers. N° 1. (UNESCO, 2010): 4, https://www.ehu.eus/documents/3120344/3356415/Culture_Development.pdf/837c2fac-4627-4a29-a21b-f41ddb52ab2.

²¹⁹ Maarten Van Opstal and Jean Hugé, “Knowledge for Sustainable Development: A Worldviews Perspective,” *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 15, no. 3 (October 17, 2012): 689, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-012-9401-5>.

among the human race and ignores culturally sensitive issues that define human interaction with the world and each other. To reach an integrated worldview, representation and open, unbiased communication are needed for any decision-making regarding sustainable development.²²⁰ The UN and any other governing body, along with its agencies and financial institutions, must be open to this pluralistic dialogue. Pluralism is the coexistence of multiple ideas or cultural norms in a society. Pluralism is an important aspect to framing sustainable development because broad respect for culture and diversity invites more participation by a country as a whole, leading to more successful initiatives.²²¹ In his book, *Encountering Development*, anthropologist Arturo Escobar explores the implications of sustainable development and paths to a pluralist societal understanding. He implies that developmental programs are entrenched in colonialism and that they are new ways for the West to control post-colonial developing nations.²²² Escobar posits that avoiding the proliferation of colonizing structures such as these will require a decentralization of capitalism and an acceptance of multiple forms of governmental organization.²²³ To avoid a modern colonized world, the free will and autonomy of a country and its people are paramount.

This is required to create sustainable developments in line with the goals outlined in OCA. However, it would be hard to gain support from actors without an interest in the future of underdeveloped countries.²²⁴ It is essential to recognize the realities of reform, especially where it is sure to find opposing forces. The funding for UN development initiatives comes from

²²⁰ Ibid., 692.

²²¹ Kopnina, Helen, and Brett Cherniak. 2016. "Neoliberalism and Justice in Education for Sustainable Development: a Call for Inclusive Pluralism." *Environmental Education Research* 22 (6): 827. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2016.1149550>.

²²² Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development : The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 9.

²²³ Ibid., xxix.

²²⁴ Ibid., 205.

wealthy countries that have no binding obligation to pay. So, even though initiatives that incorporate pluralist and culturally relative ideas would be the most beneficial to the health of a developing nation, financing countries could retract support when goals do not align with their political or social interests. Prevention of this issue requires more compulsory power given to the UN. The pluralist approach also grants so much power to individual countries that it can create economic issues for the countries funding the projects. Additionally, since pluralism is so broad, it can create avenues for newly developed countries to take advantage of their new position economically. This is something that wealthy countries will surely be wary of before they fund these missions.²²⁵ This raises the question of whether there can be ethical development initiatives with financial interests involved. Since the WB and IMF are centered on Western ideals, they will likely also view these efforts negatively.

One aspect of the OCA that can be studied further is “Solidarity with Future Generations.” The OCA discusses sustainable development and securing a safe and productive generation of youth. One of the main ideas arising from this section is intergenerational equity. Intergenerational equity “is the concept or idea of fairness or justice in relationships between children, youth, adults and seniors, particularly in terms of treatment and interactions.”²²⁶ This concept can be tied back to sustainable development and cultural relativism as it emphasizes the idea of fairness and relativity. Specifically, people can receive equal treatment or “justice” based on programmes aiding them in ways directly aligned to their ways of life. As previously argued, cultural relativism must be used for development to be sustainable and effective. By doing so,

²²⁵ Ibid., 205.

²²⁶ UNEP, “Intergenerational Equity,” intergenerational equity | UNEP Law and Environment Assistance Platform (United Nations), accessed November 25, 2022, <https://leap.unep.org/knowledge/glossary/intergenerational-equity>.

initiatives are not only helpful now but help future generations by improving conditions for different nations long term.

Current approaches to sustainable economic development also ignore the climate change prevention efforts defined through the Paris Climate Accords. Though the net zero by 2050 plan can be seen as comprehensive, it avoids the issue of developing countries and their ability to abide by it. It will take immense capital in every country to change the current economic structures, and it is not feasible to expect these measures from less wealthy countries.²²⁷ Some countries also rely on markets that impact the earth negatively. As discussed, Ghana has the second highest rate of deforestation in the world, contributed to by economic efforts set forth by the UN and its institutions. This creates a second issue where wealthy, Western countries, who initially helped to build the harmful markets plaguing the environment, are now asking smaller countries to overhaul these economies. The issues with the economic development systems currently in place are that they are layered but do not take enough care to avert damage to the countries they are purportedly helping. Moving forward, it is imperative to reframe the metrics with which we measure success, development, and progress to prevent future harm.

Moving Forward

In addition to employing cultural relativism, the meaning behind the term “development” can be re-evaluated on a state-to-state basis. Traditionally, the UN has held development to constitute economic and social progress for a state.²²⁸ In terms of economics, the UN defines

²²⁷ Filipović, Sanja, Noam Lior, and Mirjana Radovanović. 2022. “The Green Deal – Just Transition and Sustainable Development Goals Nexus.” *Renewable & Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2022.112759>.

²²⁸ United Nations, “Introduction - UN Documentation: Development - Research Guides at United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library,” Dag Hammarskjöld Library (United Nations, 1997), <https://research.un.org/en/docs/dev#:~:text=percent22Developmentpercent20ispercent20onepercent20ofpercent20the,reinforcingpercent20componentspercent20ofpercent20sustainablepercent20development>

development as “sustained economic growth.”²²⁹ Socially, the UN focuses development around ideals of democracy, gender equality, and “participation of civil society.”²³⁰ While at the surface level, these ideals of development seem unbiased and equal, they represent Westernized norms being used as the metric of success in different countries. To re-evaluate the term development would be to study and connect with different countries and peoples to learn what they believe a “successful country” looks like.

In economics, “utility” is used as a marker for happiness or the ultimate goal within an economy.²³¹ However, defining utility depends on one's culture and environmental influences. Studies have found that measuring GDP and wealth may cloud what individuals view as a “good life.”²³² Many economists tend to correlate the happiness of a nation with the economic growth and spending power of that state.²³³ However, these assumptions have been countered by several behavioral studies of countries worldwide, suggesting that there is no direct correlation between GDP and happiness.²³⁴ The main issue with UN economic development programmes from the past and even present is a fixation on economic growth and production. As previously mentioned, we must look beyond GDP when analyzing economic development. As seen in the case of Ghana, while economic growth and production were at the forefront of the SAPs implemented by the IMF, they ultimately harmed other spheres of society. As a result, these policies left Ghanaians worse off socially and environmentally. Therefore, under the terms of utility and ensuring a good quality of life, economic development programmes should encourage economic *stability* to ensure that the basic needs of individuals are met. There needs to be less

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Hershey H. Friedman, Iulian Warter, and Liviu Warter, “Economic Growth and Happiness. Cultural Relativism,” *Journal of Intercultural Management and Ethics* 1, no. 3 (2018): 32, <https://doi.org/10.35478/jime.2018.3.05>.

²³² Ibid., 32.

²³³ Ibid., 34.

²³⁴ Ibid., 34.

emphasis on growth and increasing GDP, as these ideas are Westernized notions embedded within the Bretton Woods institutions.

To further analyze economic development, the Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ECOSOC) (1966) can be used to explore the idea of economic rights. The main goal of the covenant is that "everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights."²³⁵ The covenant ensures that all individuals can live comfortably by meeting their ECOSOC rights. However, while the covenant outlines the rights within the different articles and how states enforce such rights, there are no quantifying metrics of development specified to ensure one's economic rights are met. These rights will look different to each country and government, and this covenant leaves the assumption of fulfilled rights vague.

Cultural relativism and pluralism are critical approaches to creating sustainable development within developing nations. In terms of economic development, these two frameworks can guide the UN in assisting state economies. As seen in the case of Ghana, past approaches to economic development from organizations like the IMF and the WB have not always taken a culturally relative or pluralistic approach, exacerbating systems of colonialism and hierarchy. One way cultural relativism can help aid UN economic development programmes is by looking at communities' livelihoods rather than the numeric outcome of economic production.

Conclusions

²³⁵ United Nations, "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," OHCHR (United Nations, December 16, 1966), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>.

Sustainable development has been a cornerstone of global initiatives for decades, but previous efforts have been unsuccessful in creating lasting change due to Western-centric approaches. All metrics through which we evaluate development today are entrenched in the histories of colonialism, hierarchy, and sovereignty. Future global economic success will rely upon engaging with cultural differences and understandings. Previous notions of growth and economic prosperity should be re-examined, and more inclusive ideas should be adopted by governing bodies like the UN and its institutions, the IMF and WB. By looking at historical evidence of failed economic development initiatives, we have found that it is imperative to look beyond Western expansionist ideals and to engage in pluralistic, culturally sensitive efforts to help developing countries.

Recommendations

1. Finding Alternatives to GDP

Though GDP is one of the most influential indicators around the globe, it does a poor job of measuring social welfare.²³⁶ GDP does not measure sustainability, environmental damage, or future impacts. While GDP has been treated as a “pretty good proxy” for welfare, looking at total economic activity says nothing about how income may be distributed between subgroups.²³⁷ GDP does not account for environmental damage, and its inclusion can lead to adverse outcomes, like the idea that environmental damage may actually be good for the economy if it raises GDP.²³⁸ As such, this report recommends the use of a three-level approach. The three alternative measures for progress are well-being, economic welfare, and sustainability.²³⁹ Well-

²³⁶ Rutger Hoekstra, *Replacing GDP by 2030: Towards a Common Language for the Well-Being and Sustainability Community* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 54.

²³⁷ Hoekstra, *Replacing GDP by 2030*, 69.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

²³⁹ Samuel Nii Codjoe and Fred M. Dzanku, “Long-Term Determinants of Deforestation in Ghana: The Role of Structural Adjustment Policies,” *African Development Review* 21, no. 3 (December 2009): pp. 558-588, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8268.2009.00223.x>, 360.

being can evaluate a single person's life or an entire subgroup's circumstances. This concept is multi-dimensional by nature and can accommodate different conceptualizations of well-being. Likewise, economic welfare captures the contribution of a county's economy to the overall well-being of its citizens. Lastly, sustainability analyzes whether current well-being and economic welfare levels can be sustained in the future.²⁴⁰ As such, policymakers must consider alternative approaches to GDP to accurately evaluate the impacts of economic development programmes.

2. Resolving and Preventing Debt Crises in Low-income Countries

Low-income countries are vulnerable to accumulating large amounts of debt, which can exacerbate economic instability and poverty.²⁴¹ Going forward, the debt relief process must be reformed for HIPC nations. Debt relief should not look to do the minimum amount possible to avert crises but rather offer meaningful support to end debt crises.²⁴² Further, debt cancellation is not enough, and relief should be tailored to the needs of each nation. Debt relief programmes should work towards improving debtor countries' essential services like health, education, and basic infrastructure, so that debtor nations can reach their development goals. The governments of debtor nations should also create a development plan, in conjunction with civil society groups, that includes economic reforms, improved governance, and accountability.²⁴³ Such reforms will help heavily indebted nations resolve their debt crises and prevent future debt crises from occurring.

3. Reorganizing the IMF and WB

²⁴⁰Codjoe and Dzanku, "Long-Term Determinants of Deforestation in Ghana,"

²⁴¹Jeffrey D. Sachs, "Resolving the Debt Crisis of Low-Income Countries," *The Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2002, pp. 257-286, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1353/eca.2002.0013>, 261.

²⁴² Sachs, "Resolving the Debt Crisis," 274-275.

²⁴³ Ibid., 278.

The IMF and the WB are often criticized for being overly politicized due to their disproportionate structures.²⁴⁴ Major industrial countries have controlling authority over all decisions, leaving the developing countries at a disadvantage as most of their opinions and values are ignored. The primary influence of the institutions is in voting power; in terms of the IMF, this is based on quotas and basic votes. Quotas are considered the main component of voting power, and they are linked to a country's economic strength in the global economy. How quotas are measured is distinctively restrictive to the developing world.²⁴⁵ Due to the IMF and the WB's constrictive definition of economic progress, the Western and industrial countries gain a higher voting power. Instead, the allocation of individual quota shares should be based on the economic progress of each country in terms of its internal factors, not in comparison to others.²⁴⁶ There should also be limits on the level of quotas allocated to each region. For example, the EU members share a quota of nearly 30 percent each. Limiting this quota will mitigate the disproportionality in votes and lower the inherent discrimination encountered by developing countries. By moving the measure of voting power away from GDP levels and toward individual economic circumstances, the structure of the economic institutions will be more inclusive.

4. The Use of Civil Society Groups/Actors

The fourth recommendation focuses on using the lenses of cultural relativism and pluralism to help create more relative programmes through civil society organizations and ground-level approaches with local communities. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) defines civil rights actors as “individuals and groups who voluntarily engage in forms of public participation and action around shared interests,

²⁴⁴ Lipsy and Lee, 35.

²⁴⁵ Portugal, “Improving IMF Governance,” 85.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 85.

purposes or values that are compatible with the goals of the UN: the maintenance of peace and security, the realization of development, and the promotion and respect of human rights.”²⁴⁷ Civil society groups are most often recognized as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profit organizations. However, they also refer to groups that represent cultural communities and “professionals in the culture sector” of that state.²⁴⁸ In addition to giving the UN more cultural insight, using civil society groups incorporates vulnerable social groups, helping to shape “social cohesion.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ OHCHR, “OHCHR on Civil Society Space - Office of the United Nations High ...,” OHCHR (United Nations, 2014),

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/AboutUs/CivilSociety/CS_space_UNHRSysstem_Guide.pdf. 3.

²⁴⁸ UNESCO, “Civil Society Organizations,” Diversity of Cultural Expressions (United Nations, June 27, 2018), <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/partnerships/civil-society-organizations>.

²⁴⁹ Canada, Global Affairs. “Canada’s Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance – A Feminist Approach.” GAC. Government of Canada, June 27, 2022. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/civil_policy-politique_civile.aspx?lang=eng.

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GLOBAL HEALTH CASE STUDY
Vaccine Inequality

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List of Acronyms:

COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019

ECOSOC – United Nations Economic and Social Council

GPEI – Global Polio Eradication Initiative

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

UN – United Nations

WHO – World Health Organization

WTO – World Trade Organization

Historical Case Study – Polio

The best method of providing practical epidemic policy recommendations is to evaluate the successes and failures of past eradication efforts undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO). Therefore, the polio epidemic will be used to analyze the recommendations best suited for COVID-19 and future pandemics. Before eradication efforts commenced in 1988, polio had spread across most continents, infecting around 350,000 people in 125 countries.²⁵⁰ Polio has been present in humans for thousands of years, but it was only at the beginning of the 20th century that polio wreaked havoc across large portions of the world, killing and paralyzing thousands of children each year.²⁵¹ This disease is useful to analyze due to its failure of eradication once efforts commenced in the second half of the 20th century.

Polio can spread via carriers who show little to no symptoms and has a relatively high R-naught (R_0), which refers to the number of people to whom one infected person can spread the

²⁵⁰ Bryan T. Mayer et al., “Successes and Shortcomings of Polio Eradication: A Transmission Modeling Analysis,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 177, no. 11 (June 1, 2013): 1236–1245; Stephen L., Cochi et al., “The Global Polio Eradication Initiative: Progress, Lessons Learned, and Polio Legacy Transition Planning,” *Health Affairs* 35, no. 2 (02, 2016): 277-283.

²⁵¹ Anda Baicus, “History of Polio Vaccination,” *World Journal of Virology*, Baishideng Publishing Group Co., Limited, August 12, 2012.

disease.²⁵² Polio's R_0 ranges from 5 to 7, meaning the disease can spread easily.²⁵³ However, this factor does not necessarily correlate to a higher mortality rate. Despite polio's high transmissibility, it has a relatively low mortality rate of around 5 percent.²⁵⁴ Besides death, the virus can leave patients paralyzed or unable to breathe on their own due to the damage done to the central nervous system.²⁵⁵

In 1949, American and Soviet scientists were able to grow the polio virus in human tissues in labs. This breakthrough in the labs, combined with American-Soviet research collaboration, allowed for the first polio vaccine to be introduced in 1957. This international collaboration under the backdrop of the Cold War allowed for the first advances in the response to polio. The vaccine was mainly introduced in Western countries, primarily Canada, Sweden, and the United States.²⁵⁶ After the successful elimination of polio in North America by 1983, five organizations, including the WHO and UNICEF, collectively launched Global Polio Eradication (GPEI) to eradicate polio completely.²⁵⁷ The initiative exceeded the initial budget of 18.87 billion USD as developing countries, especially those in more arid climates such as Central Africa, lacked the necessary healthcare infrastructure for mass immunization.²⁵⁸ This was partly because the polio vaccine expired quicker in higher temperatures.²⁵⁹

²⁵² Shaw, Clara L, and David A Kennedy. "What the Reproductive Number R_0 Can and Cannot Tell Us about Covid-19 Dynamics." *Theoretical population biology*. U.S. National Library of Medicine, February 2021. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7785280/>, 2

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Mayer et al., "Successes and Shortcomings of Polio Eradication: A Transmission Modeling Analysis," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 177, no. 11 (June 1, 2013): 1236–1245.

²⁵⁶ Baicus, "History of Polio Vaccination," *World Journal of Virology*, Baishideng Publishing Group Co., Limited, August 12, 2012.

²⁵⁷ Cochi et al., "The Global Polio Eradication Initiative: Progress, Lessons Learned, and Polio Legacy Transition Planning," *Health Affairs* 35, no. 2 (02, 2016): 277-283; Thomas Abraham, *Polio: The Odyssey of Eradication*, Oxford: C. Hurst and Company (Publishers) Limited, 2018.

²⁵⁸ Abraham, *Polio: The Odyssey of Eradication*, Oxford: C. Hurst and Company (Publishers) Limited, 2018.; Cochi et al, "The Global Polio Eradication Initiative: Progress, Lessons Learned, and Polio Legacy Transition Planning," *Health Affairs* 35, no. 2 (02, 2016): 277-283.

Polio is still endemic in some developing countries, especially parts of Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan.²⁶⁰ It continues to spread in these countries due to lower vaccination rates than in wealthier states. Adequate funding for a large-scale vaccination program has been lacking, and the proper infrastructure is not in place to facilitate equitable vaccine distribution.²⁶¹ Another challenge for the vaccination programs is vaccine hesitancy.²⁶² Some countries were skeptical of the West's intentions with the 1983 polio vaccination campaign. For example, political leaders' influence in northern regions of Nigeria and India believed that the West was using the polio vaccination initiative to sterilize children in their states.²⁶³ Hesitancy also stemmed from polio not being a priority within the community due to the prevalence of starvation and other more common diseases, such as cholera and dysentery. Meanwhile, the West has insisted on waging war against polio rather than other issues with a higher mortality rate.²⁶⁴ This insistency and sense of urgency surrounding polio eradication likely stems from the fact that the disease has also impacted Western countries. Without the necessary funds, distribution mechanisms, and the skepticism of the local communities in some of the affected countries, the initiative to eradicate polio failed.

²⁶⁰ Cochi et al., "The Global Polio Eradication Initiative: Progress, Lessons Learned, and Polio Legacy Transition Planning," *Health Affairs* 35, no. 2 (02, 2016): 277-283; Saint-Victor, Diane S., and Saad B. Omer. "Vaccine Refusal and the Endgame: Walking the Last Mile First." *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*, vol. 368, no. 1623, 2013, pp. 1–9. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41938026>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2022.

²⁶¹ David L. Heymann, M.D., and R. B. Aylward, "Eradicating Polio," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 351, no. 13 (Sep 23, 2004): 1275-1277; Diane S. Saint-Victor and Saad B. Omer, "Vaccine Refusal and the Endgame: Walking the Last Mile First," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 368, no. 1623 (2013): 1–9.

²⁶² David L. Heymann, M.D., and R. B. Aylward, "Eradicating Polio," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 351, no. 13 (Sep 23, 2004): 1275-1277; Diane S. Saint-Victor and Saad B. Omer, "Vaccine Refusal and the Endgame: Walking the Last Mile First," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 368, no. 1623 (2013): 1–9.

²⁶³ Heidi J. Larson and Isaac Ghinai, "Lessons from polio eradication: ridding the world of polio requires a global initiative that tailors strategies to communities," *Nature* 473, no. 7348 (2011): 446+. *Gale Academic OneFile*; Saint-Victor and Omer, "Vaccine Refusal and the Endgame: Walking the Last Mile First," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 368, 1–9.

²⁶⁴ Saint-Victor and Omer, "Vaccine Refusal and the Endgame: Walking the Last Mile First," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 368, 1–9.

The shortcomings of the GPEI's vaccination campaign in the global south highlight the colonialism and hierarchy embedded into the global healthcare system. The delay of 30 years between administering polio vaccines in northern countries points to the hoarding of vaccines by wealthy nations that is still present today. The order in which states received vaccines illustrates the hierarchy of states in developing health programs which puts wealthy powers above developing states. This is a symptom of wealthy states exploiting the colonial system already in place. The belief is that the West is attempting to oppress their native country, disregarding a state's national sovereignty by imposing Western health values.

Vaccine Nationalism and Hoarding

Vaccine nationalism has historically been a prevalent trend in numerous past pandemics. Most recently, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic witnessed a rise in vaccine nationalism among state actors. Vaccine nationalism is when states attempt to secure first access to vaccine supplies or over stock vaccines, prioritizing the needs of their own populations. States that are higher on the global wealth hierarchy can use Advanced Purchase Agreements (APAs) and bilateral contracts with pharmaceutical companies to acquire vaccine supplies before they are even available on global markets.²⁶⁵ This is often followed by vaccine hoarding and stockpiling once a vaccine is approved and distributed. Low-income states that do not have the necessary financial capacity automatically lack access to these vital resources. For example, in the COVID-19 pandemic, states in Central and West Africa had the slowest access to vaccines. Developed states like Canada and the United States began administering vaccinations in December 2020,

²⁶⁵ Sam Halabi and Ana Santos Rutschman, "Viral Sovereignty, Vaccine Diplomacy, and Vaccine Nationalism: The Institutions of Global Vaccine Access," *SSRN Electronic Journal* 36, no. 1 (2022): pp. 1-32, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3902809>, 5.

while states like Ivory Coast and Ghana lacked access until 2021.²⁶⁶ Developed countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates have even been able to provide multiple booster doses to their citizens in addition to their first vaccines. Developed states stockpiled vaccines in excess, resulting in vaccines being expired and wasted.²⁶⁷ This disparity reflects the hierarchical structure of the global order, where affluent countries can hoard resources while other states struggle to gain access. As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic has been prolonged as countries with large populations, such as Brazil and Bangladesh, remain unvaccinated, allowing new variants like Omicron to proliferate.²⁶⁸ Though the COVID-19 pandemic is a relatively recent phenomenon, vaccine nationalism has been observed in past health crises. Polio, smallpox, and the H1N1 pandemic saw developed countries inoculating their own populations and eradicating the disease years before developing countries could secure access to vaccines. The concept of sovereignty has formed the basis for this state-first approach because public health is viewed as a national issue.²⁶⁹ This significantly undermines attempts to achieve international cooperation, which is necessary for eradicating diseases on a global scale.

²⁶⁶ Public Health Agency of Canada, “COVID-19 Vaccination in Canada,” Canada.ca (Government of Canada, April 16, 2021), <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/vaccine-administration/>; Office of the Commissioner, “FDA Approves First COVID-19 Vaccine,” U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA, August 23, 2021), <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-covid-19-vaccine>; “National Covid-19 Vaccination Campaign Officially Launched in the Central African Republic Peacekeeping,” United Nations (United Nations, May 24, 2021), <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/national-covid-19-vaccination-campaign-officially-launched-central-african-republic>.

²⁶⁷ Lise Barnéoud, “The Huge Waste of Expired COVID-19 Vaccines,” *Le Monde* (April 4, 2022), https://www.lemonde.fr/en/science/article/2022/04/04/the-huge-waste-of-expired-covid-19-vaccines_5979632_10.html.

²⁶⁸ Mehr Muhammad Adeel Riaz, Unaiza Ahmad, Anmol Mohan et al., “Global impact of vaccine nationalism during COVID-19 pandemic,” *Trop Med Health* 49, no. 101 (2021): 2-3, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41182-021-00394-0>.

²⁶⁹ Sam Halabi and Ana Santos Rutschman, “Viral Sovereignty, Vaccine Diplomacy, and Vaccine Nationalism: The Institutions of Global Vaccine Access,” *SSRN Electronic Journal* 36, no. 1 (2022): pp. 1-32, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3902809>, 11-12; David P. Fidler, “Vaccine Nationalism’s Politics,” *Science* 369, no. 6505 (2020): 749, doi:10.1126/science.abe2275.

WHO chief, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has warned against vaccine nationalism as a critical barrier to ending the ongoing pandemic.²⁷⁰ Instead, the WHO has pushed for a coordinated approach to ensure fair and equitable vaccine access for all countries.²⁷¹ The COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access program, or COVAX, attempts to bridge the gap between low-income and high-income countries by pooling resources and fairly distributing vaccine doses.²⁷² Nonetheless, wealthy countries like the United States have shown a lackluster commitment to these ideals. Given the preeminence of the Westphalian state model, the WHO can do little to enforce its will on sovereign states which have exclusive and absolute control within their borders. As an international institution, the WHO lacks the authority to compel states to share vaccine stockpiles or override bilateral agreements with corporations. Consequently, only 68.4 percent of the world has received at least one dose, and as of November 1, 2022, 31.6 percent of the global population remains entirely unvaccinated.²⁷³ Vaccine nationalism ultimately prolongs the pandemic by fracturing the international, collaborative approach championed by the WHO.

Vaccine nationalism has not only maintained global power and wealth hierarchies but prolonged the COVID-19 pandemic itself. New variants continue to arise, even in countries that have vaccinated most of their population. However, economic and health consequences will hit the poorest countries the hardest. Vaccine inequity is not only rooted in the global hierarchy but actively reinforces the disparity between the developed and developing world.

²⁷⁰ UN News, “Who Chief Warns against Covid-19 'Vaccine Nationalism', Urges Support for Fair Access | | 1UN News,” United Nations (United Nations, August 18, 2020), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1070422>.

²⁷¹ UN News, “Who Chief Warns against Covid-19 'Vaccine Nationalism', Urges Support for Fair Access | | 1UN News,” United Nations (United Nations, August 18, 2020), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1070422>.

²⁷² UN News, “Who Chief Warns against Covid-19 'Vaccine Nationalism', Urges Support for Fair Access | | 1UN News,” United Nations (United Nations, August 18, 2020), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1070422>.

²⁷³ Edouard Mathieu, Hannah Ritchie, Lucas Rodes-Guirao et al., “Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19),” retrieved from ‘<https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>’.

Patents:

Patents are a mechanism that reinforce the global hierarchy. A patent is a licensing agreement that excludes others from making, using, or selling an invention, such as a pharmaceutical drug or vaccine. Companies will patent their creations to dominate the market for a set period, and anyone who infringes on the patent can be taken to court. As most of the global health infrastructure is in developed countries, developing countries face many barriers to accessing patented medical goods, such as price and timely distribution. The WHO has not only failed to account for and intervene in this stratification but contributes to it through The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). TRIPS established patent mandates on pharmaceuticals, hindering developing countries' access to medicine. Patents allow companies to exercise complete control over the production and distribution of their products. In the case of vaccines, pharmaceutical companies get to decide which nations receive their vaccine, how much of it, when they get it, and at what cost. Developed nations have funded some research companies, and therefore, have agreements to get priority distribution or cost reductions. For example, investigations have found AstraZeneca charged the EU USD 2.15 per dose while charging South Africa USD 5.25 per dose.²⁷⁴ Some claim this is due to early development funding by governments equating to a lesser product price, while others point to the lack of transparency in bilateral agreements. Both claims highlight the hierarchical nature of a global market and how multilateralism is required to circumvent the issue.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Owen Dyer, "Covid-19: Countries are learning what others paid for vaccines," *BMJ* 2021; 372 :n281 doi:10.1136/bmj.n281

²⁷⁵ Dyer, "Covid-19: Countries are learning what others paid for vaccines."

The WHO has attempted to acknowledge the barriers patents present in efficiently tackling health crises, as seen in the Doha Declaration. This agreement aims to adapt and implement World Trade Organization (WTO) policies for developing states.²⁷⁶ However, it is not effective. Paragraph 6 in the Doha Declaration allows for compulsory licensing, which enables certain states to circumvent health-related patents under specific circumstances. Even with the compulsory licensing clause, countries are limited in the amount they can attain and are restricted to a period the license is in effect, neither of which are functional restrictions in a global pandemic. Further, many states are hesitant to enact the clause for fear of soft power reprisals or being unfamiliar with the clause and the required process.²⁷⁷

Vaccine Accessibility

Low-income countries see significantly lower vaccination rates. On average, 24 percent of the population of low-income countries have received one dose, while in high-income countries, the number is 82 percent.²⁷⁸ For example, the Democratic Republic of Congo reports only 6.4 percent of their population having one dose and only 5 percent having received more than one dose, whereas in Canada, 89 percent of the population have at least one dose, 84 percent have received more than one, and 71 percent have more than two doses.²⁷⁹ This significant discrepancy in vaccine distribution demonstrates how institutionalized systems of oppression have affected vaccine accessibility. Efforts to contain COVID-19 have shown inequalities and imbalances of power structures, proving a dire need to decolonize global health.

²⁷⁶ *The Doha Declaration explained*. WTO. (2022). Retrieved November 25, 2022, from https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dda_e/dohaexplained_e.htm

²⁷⁷ Hilary Wong, "The Case for Compulsory Licensing during COVID-19," *Journal of Global Health* 10, no. 1 (June 15, 2020). doi:10.7189/jogh.10.010358., 1-4.

²⁷⁸ Josh Holder, "Tracking Coronavirus Vaccinations around the World," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html>.

²⁷⁹ Holder, "Tracking Coronavirus Vaccinations around the World," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html>.

Vaccine hesitancy among certain populations has also affected global discrepancies in vaccination rates. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, research conducted worldwide showed an increase in vaccine hesitancy, as seen with polio. In a 2019 publication, the WHO declared vaccine hesitancy one of the top ten threats to global health.²⁸⁰ This decision came in the wake of declining vaccine confidence around the world. This trend appears to have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccine hesitancy is a complex issue that stems from institutional and structural systems of oppression that have led certain marginalized group to distrust the government and healthcare systems.²⁸¹ Recent studies on the COVID-19 pandemic have noted an increasing number of people displaying vaccine hesitancy. In the United States, lower vaccination rates in Black and Hispanic minorities have been linked with a distrust of the government because of institutional racism.²⁸² This distrust shows the legacy of colonialism and hierarchy that still impact global health efforts.

Vaccine hesitancy can be linked to the historical cases of Western countries conducting medical experiments on vulnerable populations. For example, Africa was suggested as a testing ground for the effectiveness of a tuberculosis vaccine against COVID-19 by two French scientists.²⁸³ This is one example of a colonial mentality that the pandemic has exacerbated. The United States has done this too – they sent 2 million doses of Hydroxychloroquine as a possible cure for COVID-19 to Brazil – despite prohibiting the drug in America. When this occurred,

²⁸⁰ Alexandre de Figueiredo et al., “Mapping Global Trends in Vaccine Confidence and Investigating Barriers to Vaccine Uptake: A Large-Scale Retrospective Temporal Modelling Study,” *The Lancet* 396, no. 10255 (2020): pp. 898-908, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(20\)31558-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(20)31558-0). 898

²⁸¹ Md. Rafiul Biswas, Mahmood Saleh Alzubaidi, Uzair Shah, Alaa A. Abd-Alrazaq, and Zubair Shah, 2021, “A Scoping Review to Find Out Worldwide COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy and Its Underlying Determinants,” *Vaccines* 9, no. 11: 1243, <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines9111243>, 1

²⁸² Biswas, Alzubaidi, Shah, Abd-Alrazaq, and Shah, 2021, “A Scoping Review to Find Out Worldwide COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy and Its Underlying Determinants,” 12.

²⁸³ Amruta Byatnal, “Is Covid-19 Magnifying Colonial Attitudes in Global Health?” *devex*, June 19, 2020, <https://www.devex.com/news/is-covid-19-magnifying-colonial-attitudes-in-global-health-97499>.

many academics in Brazil called out this behavior, arguing that Western and developed countries use developing countries as test subjects for their scientific experiments.²⁸⁴ The impacts of present-day and historical cases of medical experimentation have contributed to a distrust of healthcare organizations in minority groups.²⁸⁵ Scientists operating in the West are aware that conducting the same experiments and trials they have performed in low and middle-income countries would not be permissible in high-income countries because of different standards of care.²⁸⁶ These actions highlight a persistent imperial arrogance prevalent in numerous multinational clinical trials, reinforcing an outdated notion of hierarchy in the international system.

Other aspects of colonial legacies also constitute another factor hindering the vaccination process in developing states. Poor health infrastructure and underfunded health resources prevent many states from accessing the global vaccine market and inoculating their own population. African states hold 36 percent of the global disease burden yet account for less than 2 percent of global health expenditure. Further, Africans are more susceptible to COVID-19 as much of the population already struggles from malnutrition, dense populations, the prevalence of immunocompromising diseases, a lack of health literacy, and health expenses primarily carried by individuals, most of which cannot afford treatment.²⁸⁷ In sum, the legacies of colonialism and

²⁸⁴ Byatnal, "Is Covid-19 Magnifying Colonial Attitudes in Global Health?"

²⁸⁵ Biswas, Alzubaidi, Shah, Abd-Alrazaq, and Shah, 2021, "A Scoping Review to Find Out Worldwide COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy and Its Underlying Determinants," pg. 12

²⁸⁶ Fernando Hellmann, Bryn Williams-Jones, and Volnei Garrafa, "Covid-19 and Moral Imperialism in Multinational Clinical Research," Archives of medical research (U.S. National Library of Medicine, August 2020), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7188637/>.

²⁸⁷ Muhammad Z. Abbas, "World Trade Organization's Export-Oriented Compulsory Licensing Mechanism: Foreseen Policy Concern for Africa to Mitigate the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Generic Medicines: The Business Journal for the Generic Medicines Sector* 17, no. 2 (June 1, 2021): 71–72. doi:10.1177/17411343211010205.

hierarchy in the international system have significantly contributed to discrepancies in vaccine accessibility during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusions

Examining the efforts to eradicate polio and COVID-19 are important because these cases highlight the hierarchy, colonialism, and nationalism in the global healthcare system. The issues that plagued the effort to evenly distribute the COVID-19 vaccine echo the problems that hindered the polio response. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the inequalities that exist in the global order. Developing countries continue to be disadvantaged by poor health infrastructure. Due to the historical legacy of colonialism, developed states continue to prioritize their own people at the expense of developing states. The COVID-19 pandemic is a prime example of how this colonial past still affects international resource distribution. Although the WHO advocates for vaccine equity, wealthy countries purchased millions of COVID-19 doses at lower prices. This has left low-income states without the financial means to afford vaccines to help their citizens.

Recommendations:

Vaccine Stockpiles for Prevalent and High-Risk Diseases:

Addressing vaccine access will mitigate the problems caused by vaccine hoarding and, more broadly, hierarchy and colonialism. By creating a vaccine stockpile, developing states unable to access vaccines through their own means will be able to utilize the stockpile. The vaccine stockpile's application to COVID-19 is still relevant two years into the pandemic since new variants are constantly emerging. This stockpile should also be broadened to include vaccines for other diseases and future global emergency health concerns. To create the stockpile, states and corporations who produce vaccines must divert a set percentage of vaccines created to

the reserve. The donated vaccines can be housed in easily accessible places in the Global South, such as Nairobi – home to a UN regional office – and Manila, another region for WHO activity. Other locations could include Geneva, the site of the Ebola vaccine stockpile, or the research facility proposed in our second recommendation. The stockpile will be overseen by organizations of the UN, such as the WHO.

This endeavor would address OCA’s goal of an inclusive multilateral system and global cooperation. It would also address the issues of colonialism and hierarchy by redistributing wealth via health mechanisms.

Research Center:

We recommend the creation of multilateral and apolitical research centers on territories overseen solely by the UN, similar to the UN headquarters in New York City, USA. We propose the seven regional facilities located strategically around the globe, closer to more vulnerable populations, to ease the strain on distribution networks. While the territory of the UN is situated within national borders, the UN and health organizations will be the primary overseers of the area. These facilities will be for scientific research, vaccine development, and vaccine stockpiling. This will mitigate vaccine nationalism and encourage multinational cooperation since no state can control the stockpile. We will build trust by having multilateral research centers for future pandemics, as most countries are interested in contributing to emergency response plans that could benefit them, as evident by COVAX. With the risk that any state could face another global health crisis, this will be an incentive to foster positive relations to collectively overcome another pandemic. It is in the state’s national interest to collaborate with other states to protect their population from future pandemics through collective vaccination. By protecting their interests, they end up protecting the interests of the global community. Also, the

extraterritoriality acquired by the facilities will further the multilateral cooperation by minimizing any possible host country from interfering. The status will be protected and enforced by the UN member states. This will contribute to the OCA's goals of building trust and combatting nationalism, as well as many aspects under *Commitment 12: Be Prepared*. This can be done by including a global vaccination plan, empowering the WHO, strengthening global health security and preparedness, and accelerating product development and access to health technologies in low- and middle-income countries.

WHO Vaccine Standards:

Recognizing that the recommended Research Centre is primarily useful in addressing the hierarchy and colonialism issues among states, additional efforts must be taken to ensure that corporations meet vaccine testing standards. The WHO should require vaccines to meet the Research Centre's standards before they are officially approved and recognized. These standards should ensure that vaccine testing reflects a balanced ratio of non-vulnerable populations, accounting for gender and racial groups. Although states may not be incentivized to meet these standards, corporations wishing to sell their vaccines internationally will be incentivized to receive WHO approval. This effort would help to ensure that vaccines are being tested in a way that reflects inclusivity and best scientific practices. Regarding the OCA, broadening standardized testing will build the Global South's trust in Western medicine.

Addressing Information Gaps:

Another way to bridge the disparity between wealthy and developing states is by addressing the information gap. Various UN agencies can achieve this by launching information campaigns in collaboration with locally affected communities. This can take the form of expanding internet networks through satellites, translating necessary documents into local

languages, and taking steps to increase national literacy rates. People can make more informed health decisions when they have access to the most up-to-date and correct information.

Increasing universal access to information will also combat the spread of misinformation. To expand on the OCA's call to end the infodemic and ground decisions in science, we recommend that this project is housed under ECOSOC with state participation. To produce culturally relevant information, ECOSOC must collaborate with their regional offices and local NGOs.

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GLOBAL COMMONS CASE STUDY
The Great Pacific Garbage Patch

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List of Acronyms:

ABNJ – Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction

EEZs – Exclusive Economic Zones

GPGP – Great Pacific Garbage Patch

IMO – International Maritime Organization

OCA – Our Common Agenda

UNCLOS – United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

Historical Analysis

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP) is a collection of marine debris (microplastics, plastic waste, fishing nets, and more) in the North Pacific Ocean. It was discovered by Charles Moore on a yachting race in 1997, where he and his crew found millions of pieces of debris as they were travelling.²⁸⁸ There are many ecological issues with the GPGP: it leads to microplastics in the water, which then end up in animals' stomachs; it prevents algae and plankton from photosynthesizing; and the plastics inside of it will take thousands of years to break down, all while releasing harmful chemicals into the environment.²⁸⁹ In Our Common Agenda (OCA), the United Nations (UN) identified the High Seas as one of the global commons that it wanted to protect. However, the report's outlook is grim, stating that "even with an extremely ambitious scenario, the level of microplastics in the ocean could double by [2050] as accumulated plastic waste slowly degrades into smaller pieces."²⁹⁰ If the UN does not address the ecological impacts of the GPGP, as well as account for the disproportionate way that it

²⁸⁸ "Great Pacific Garbage Patch," National Geographic Society, accessed November 6, 2022, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/great-pacific-garbage-patch/>.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ United Nations Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda - Report of the Secretary-General* (New York, NY:2021), 49.

affects already vulnerable communities, pre-existing hierarchical structures will continue to block OCA's goals of leaving no one behind.

Despite the detrimental impacts of the GPGP, efforts to clean it up have been minimal. This is because of the nature of the global commons: individuals and corporations do not directly feel or pay the costs of the negative externalities of the plastics at sea.²⁹¹ Moreover, plastics are so cheap and convenient that the issue will prevail until international agreements are established to remove the GPGP and prevent more plastics from flowing toward it. One of the key action points in OCA was to protect the planet, specifically to “account for the environment in economic models,” which will not be possible without new legal precedents that attach a price to land-created plastics in the ocean.²⁹² As we will see from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) I in 1958, II in 1960, and III In 1982, this is easier said than done as the GPGP does not reside within any nation's borders. There are two main reasons why the Conventions have fallen short of expectations. Firstly, UNCLOS does not extend nations' water sovereignty lines to include the GPGP, and secondly, it has no specific policies in place to achieve its goals of introducing legislation in signatory states that would minimize land-based marine debris.²⁹³ Thus, the mere existence of the GPGP proves that the historical approaches to solving the issue have not been fruitful. These legal challenges exist because a lack of sovereignty shields member states from taking responsibility. Until this problem is solved, OCA's goal of protecting the planet and being prepared for future (climate) disasters will not be met.

²⁹¹ Santamaria, Andre M. "The Pacific Garbage Patch, Everyone's Responsibility but Nobody's Problem: A Critical Analysis of Public International Law Regimes as They Relate to the Growing Toxicity of the Environment." *J. Envtl. L. & Litig.* 32 (2016), 189.

²⁹² United Nations Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary General* (New York, NY:2021), 6.

²⁹³ Jessica R Coulter, “A Sea Change to Change the Sea: Stopping the Spread of the Pacific Garbage Patch with Small-Scale Environmental Legislation,” *William and Mary Law Review* 51, no. 5 (2010).

Lastly, many regions who are protectors of the water are often left out of the climate discussion despite disproportionately facing the negative environmental consequences of pollution. For example, while the Pacific Islands contribute as little as 1.3 percent of the world's plastics pollution, it often receives plastic waste from other countries due to the “waste colonization in the Pacific Islands [...] due to its geographical location and colonial history.”²⁹⁴ The lack of jurisdiction within the High Seas has continued the exploitation and colonization of Indigenous groups, preventing them from sharing their stories and stunting their ability to access the oceans for food. Indigenous peoples have cared for the waters for centuries, and their perspectives must be considered for a well-rounded solution to protect our planet.

Ecological Implications

The ocean and its biodiversity are the foundation for life on earth. We continually rely upon oceans not only as a source of food but for our livelihoods and the habitability of our planet. However, the GPGP threatens each of these factors. From the ingestion and accumulation of microplastics in marine life to the change in the pH balance of the oceans themselves, the subsequent extinction of species, including our own, remains imminent. In many respects, large-scale ecological collapse has already begun. Like humans, marine life such as zooplankton, a vital species in many aquatic food chains, are extremely sensitive to environmental changes. The introduction of microplastics into zooplankton habitats and subsequent ingestion of these pollutants has already begun to ravage populations of such vulnerable species.²⁹⁵ Furthermore, rampant overfishing and a lack of proper accountability from fishermen and governments alike

²⁹⁴ “Pursuing Solutions Led by Indigenous Peoples Are a Vital Part of Efforts to Reverse Plastics Pollution.” EIA. Environmental Investigation Agency, August 16, 2022. <https://eia-international.org/news/pursuing-solutions-led-by-indigenous-peoples-are-a-vital-part-of-efforts-to-reverse-plastics-pollution/>.

²⁹⁵ Zara L.R. Botterell et al., “Bioavailability and Effects of Microplastics on Marine Zooplankton: A Review,” *Environmental Pollution* 245 (2019): pp. 98-110, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2018.10.065>, 98.

has resulted in the estimated loss of over 2 billion Brachyuran crabs this year.²⁹⁶ Moreover, adverse ecological effects have not been limited strictly to marine animals. Ingested plastics have negatively impacted the growth and feeding habits among native bird populations, further disrupting biodiversity and ecological balances in the Pacific.²⁹⁷ Moreover, plastics in the Pacific Ocean provide abundant opportunities for invasive species to flourish. Non-native species of barnacles, algae, and mollusks frequently detected in the GPGP are of particular concern for their increasingly adverse impact on established marine populations.²⁹⁸ As such, the presence of microplastics in the Pacific Ocean has posed a broadly multi-faceted and interconnected ecological problem.

The ecological ramifications endured thus far should constitute warning signs to states and communities that rely on fishing and other marine activities for revenue. If left unchecked, the continued growth of the GPGP poses a serious threat to both marine populations as well as human economic, social, and environmental activities. Of particular concern are the developing economies and island nations of the Pacific region who have endured the brunt of extreme weather events and consequences of small-scale ecological collapse resulting from the GPGP.²⁹⁹ As such, these indicator species and events should serve as warning signs to states that ecological and local economic collapse is both real and imminent should nations and individual actors continue to neglect the environmental ramifications of their activities in the Pacific.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ Megan J Peterson Williams et al., “The Heat Is on: Gulf of Alaska Pacific Cod and Climate-Ready Fisheries,” *ICES Journal of Marine Science* 79, no. 2 (January 2021): pp. 573-583, <https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsab032>, 574.

²⁹⁷ Michelle Sigler, “Effects of Plastic Pollution on Aquatic Wildlife: Current Situations and Future Solutions,” *Water, Air, and Soil Pollution* 225 no. 11 (2014), 4. doi.org/10.1007/s11270-014-2184-6.

²⁹⁸ Sigler, The Effects of Plastic Pollution on Aquatic Wildlife: Current Situations and Future Solutions, 2.

²⁹⁹ Dahlia Simangan, (2021) Where is the Asia Pacific in mainstream international relations scholarship on the Anthropocene?, *The Pacific Review* 34 no. 5 (2021), 726. doi: 10.1080/09512748.2020.1732452

³⁰⁰ Gregory Stone, “We Cannot Survive without Our Oceans. We Must Act to Save Them - Now,” World Economic Forum, November 9, 2016, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/11/an-ocean-renaissance-is-key-to-our-survival/>, 1.

Legal Implications

The GPGP is not only an environmental issue but also a legal matter, dealing with themes of state sovereignty and the Law of the Sea. Efforts have been made to define the environmental jurisdictional rights and responsibilities of states in relation to the oceans, most notably through the creation and adoption of UNCLOS I, II, and III.³⁰¹ Nevertheless, these are broad recommendations and obligations that cannot be enforced on states due to pre-existing regulations around state sovereignty. These principles of state authority have allowed for legal circumvention of state environmental responsibility and have enabled governments to ignore Indigenous sovereignty and agency in regions like the South Pacific.

It is important to define the global commons in relation to international law. As part of the global commons, the oceans are unowned natural resources that lack their *own government*, at least in the Westphalian system.³⁰² This encompasses many of the reasons why the legal implications of cleaning up the GPGP are so far-reaching. For one, countries can and have made assertions of sovereignty on coastal waters and exclusive economic zones (EEZs); however, due to the location of the GPGP, none of these jurisdictional delimitations are big enough to include it, thus rendering it outside of any one state's sphere of "direct responsibility." Meanwhile, groups with active interests in solving the matter, such as the Pacific Islanders, are impeded from independently acting with non-state agency.

Another significant gap in the legislature exists in connection to pollution from land-based activities and the ability of international organizations to regulate commercial practices within a state's boundaries. Considering that most of the plastic in the GPGP comes from dry

³⁰¹ Daniel Bodansky, "Protecting the Marine Environment from Vessel-Source Pollution," *Ecology Law Quarterly*, 721.

³⁰² Anne Longo, "Governing a Continent of Trash: The Global Politics of Oceanic Pollution," 4.

land, the most efficient way to decrease plastic entering the seas would be to reduce plastic production and consumption on land.³⁰³ These actions, clearly within the scope of a state's national jurisdiction, are unlikely to occur even with supranational encouragement. The reasons for this lie in the vast ramifications that regulation of economic, social, and industrial activities would have within countries without any incentive other than cleaning the GPGP. For example, eliminating single-use plastics through legal action within a state could cost that domestic economy considerably while simultaneously being a lengthy process that requires popular support to be adopted successfully.

The lack of action to clean up the GPGP is not due to a lack of specialized agencies to regulate human activities in the oceans. For example, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) is the specialized agency of the UN that deals with “the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine and atmospheric pollution by ships.”³⁰⁴ UNCLOS also delineates the status of the High Seas and the international customary law surrounding it, but it fails to clearly outline the model under which states can act in areas beyond national jurisdiction. According to the Convention, “no State may validly purport to subject any part of the high seas to its sovereignty,” given that the High Seas are open to all States.³⁰⁵ The document outlines freedom of navigation and fishing yet does not mention the equal responsibility of *all States* to protect the High Seas environment.

Aware of the exponential increase of plastic concentration in the GPGP, one of the most promising working groups for the development of a clean-up initiative based on principles of international maritime law is the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and their study on

³⁰³ Ibid., 11.

³⁰⁴ United Nations, *Introduction to the International Maritime Organization*.

³⁰⁵ United Nations, *Convention on the Law of the Sea* (New York: United Nations, December 1982), Part VII, 57.

marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ).³⁰⁶ If this group were to successfully argue the state's responsibility to protect species that inhabit their territories and ABNJ concurrently, then a legal precedent could be set for the responsibility of specific states in the clean-up of the GPGP. However, this precedent must be careful to establish a responsibility to clear the ocean of plastic without creating an avenue for future jurisdiction claims, further perpetuating cycles of hierarchy, colonialism, and using sovereignty as a tool for oppression.

Equally important is integrating traditional Pacific land rights into the current discourse on sovereignty and environmental responsibility to give Indigenous stewardship of the oceans a more prominent role. Areas managed and protected by Indigenous groups degrade less quickly than those under the direct jurisdiction of states.³⁰⁷ Developing domestic legal systems in Pacific states that combine traditional Indigenous legal principles and current international legal principles could present a feasible and powerful tool for reconciliation between Indigenous and Western law. This is urgent given that recognition of Indigenous legal tradition in the Pacific could lay the foundation for claims of Indigenous stewardship over Westphalian state sovereignty to better protect the most vulnerable areas from other issues such as rising sea levels, coral bleaching, and excessive fishing.³⁰⁸

The Indigenous Impact

It is essential to recognize that Indigenous and lower-socioeconomic communities are disproportionately affected by plastic pollution.³⁰⁹ Indigenous populations have historically been burdened by pollution, and oceanic pollution is no exemption to this trend. Indigenous

³⁰⁶ Lebreton et al., "Evidence that the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is rapidly accumulating plastic," *Sci Rep*.

³⁰⁷ United Nations Environmental Programme, Report: Indigenous Peoples and the Land they Protect. June 2020.

³⁰⁸ Justice Margaret McMurdo and Jodi Gardner, *Traditional Pacific Land Rights and International Law: Tensions and Evolution*, 138-139.

³⁰⁹ Matt Peryman, "An Indigenous Perspective on the Plastic Pollution Crisis," Greenpeace Aotearoa, February 24, 2022, <https://www.greenpeace.org/aotearoa/story/global-plastics-treaty-an-indigenous-perspective-on-the-plastic-pollution-crisis/>.

communities carry this burden for various reasons, including their reliance on traditional hunting and fishing practices, polluting infrastructures located in their communities, poor water quality, and inadequate support from the government.³¹⁰ These burdens are observed through the negative impacts that plastic pollution has had on marine life, freshwater, and atmospheric pollution.³¹¹ Given these consequences, Pacific Indigenous peoples must be included in the solutions to the GPGP. Despite being historically neglected in the discourse of global solutions, Indigenous perspectives offer invaluable insight, especially in the realm of oceanic pollution and its adverse environmental effects. Various forms of Indigenous activism have already been known to positively impact pollution activity. One example transferable to the GPGP is the incorporation of the holistic and multifunctional water resource management practices of Indigenous communities, which have been effective in the pollution prevention measures of freshwater landscapes.³¹² Including Indigenous voices in policy solutions will not only ensure that Indigenous social, spiritual, and customary values are included, but it will also assist in protecting our ecosystems and human well-being.³¹³

The GPGP can also be conceptualized beyond its strictly environmental and legal context. Specifically, the implications of this amassment of waste extend beyond the effects of pollution and into the faults of the global political economy. Through its locality and main contributors, a larger issue within global politics is unveiled; colonial methodology has been ingrained into the modern configuration of international relations. The broader geographical area of the Pacific constitutes a space that has been neglected by the world through limited correct

³¹⁰ “Indigenous Peoples around the Globe Are Disproportionately Affected by Pollution,” Newsroom, May 19, 2020, <https://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/indigenous-peoples-around-globe-are-disproportionately-affected-pollution-322211>.

³¹¹ Peryman, “An Indigenous Perspective on the Plastic Pollution Crisis.”

³¹² Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares et al., “A State-of-the-Art Review of Indigenous Peoples and Environmental Pollution,” *Integrated Environmental Assessment and Management* 16, no. 3 (April 2020), 331.

³¹³ Fernández et al., “A State-of-the-Art Review of Indigenous Peoples and Environmental Pollution,” 334.

popular understandings.³¹⁴ Specific to the ocean, this body of water is “enmeshed with Indigenous experiences of colonization but also acts as a means to pursue self-determined futures.”³¹⁵ By polluting the ocean, we are directly stunting the growth and ability of these communities to recover from colonization, both physically through economic exchange and travel, and culturally through kinship.³¹⁶

There has been a deep reverence for these waters, sustained by the Indigenous peoples of Oceania that recognize the Pacific Ocean beyond its ability to provide physical resources. This is maintained by a well-documented past of Indigenous protest literature. While these sources date back to the 90s, they are rooted in deep, rich histories that predate our millennium. Pacific Indigenous protest literature applies a strong narrative lens that emphasizes storytelling as an activist method of “creating meaning” for these waters outside of a remote and ill-defined global common.³¹⁷ Within this literature, the Pacific is defined as Wansolwara, or “one salt water.”³¹⁸ Comparing this to modern imperial conceptions of the Pacific as “islands within a far sea,” rather than a “sea of islands,” represents the necessity of incorporating narrative elements into discourse as a method of holistic restoration.³¹⁹ When we leave space undefined, it becomes forgotten or ignored, leading to accumulation of problems that manifest materially, exactly as in the case of the GPGP.³²⁰

³¹⁴ Alice Te Punga Somerville, “The Great Pacific Garbage Patch as Metaphor - The (American) Pacific You Can't See,” Chapter in *Archipelagic American Studies* by Roberts, Brian and Russell, Michelle Ann Stephens, *Duke University Press*, (2017), 321

³¹⁵ Bonnie Etherington, “One Salt Water: Writing the Pacific Ocean in Contemporary Indigenous Protest Literatures” Dissertation, ProQuest, (2020), 3.

³¹⁶ Somerville, “The Great Pacific Garbage Patch as Metaphor - The (American) Pacific You Can't See,” 324.

³¹⁷ Etherington, “One Salt Water: Writing the Pacific Ocean in Contemporary Indigenous Protest Literatures,” 178

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹⁹ Epeli Hau'ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” In *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, ed. Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau'ofa, *University of the South Pacific*, (1993), 7.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

Fijian-Tongan scholar, Tagi Qolouvaki, goes so far as to identify the integrity of these waters as contingent on the creation of story; they write: “our Wansolwara is seeded through story.”³²¹ What storytelling does for the GPGP, is retell how we have come to understand the Pacific (and the global commons more broadly) and the processes that have allowed this aggregation to occur. This then opens the table to incorporating Indigenous histories and practices, expanding the praxis of global politics to better incorporate diversity in ecology and sovereignty. Here, storytelling becomes essential in envisioning a decolonial path through Indigenous solutions. We can reconfigure the ocean as storied space under Wansolwara, defining this global common through Indigenous history, culture, and genealogy, rather than a foreign aggregation of islands that exists under the accountability of no one.³²² Through our research, we find that the “noken praxis” sufficiently demonstrates solutions that are adequately geared towards the GPGP; through the critical use of “material and embodied acts of story-making” we can conceptualize this space as specifically Indigenous space.³²³ In turn, we can work towards reconfiguring the global hierarchy amongst species while honouring all aspects of the natural world.

This custom comes from Noken of Papua and is a fluid concept of heritage which finds its groundings in geographical conditions, beliefs, identity, and plurality, of its peoples and creation.³²⁴ It relies on a positive progression of these elements to celebrate, protect, and incorporate diversity in all areas of physical life.³²⁵ As an “intangible heritage,” it is typically associated with women’s identities, honouring their femininity and status as a creature of God.³²⁶

³²¹ Etherington, “One Salt Water: Writing the Pacific Ocean in Contemporary Indigenous Protest Literatures,” 14.

³²² *Ibid.*, 17.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

³²⁶ Elisabeth Lenny Marit, “Noken Dan Perempuan Papua: Analisis Wacana Gender Dan Ideologi,” *Melanesia: Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Bahasa dan Sastra* 1, no. 1 (2018), 34.

Within Pacific Indigenous protest literature, the “noken praxis” has been applied in accordance with its principles of equity and diversity. Under these values, they acknowledge the equity of *all* creation and its provision of richness and diversity in ecology and resources. Through an incorporation of these values in international politics, the hierarchy of species designed under the current neo-liberal political paradigm can be rewritten, creating a more equitable ranking. Ideally, a new heterarchy would be constructed, allowing for more adaptable methods of management and prioritization within the UN, whereby problem management becomes more integrated. Heterarchies ensure that all members of an organizational structure can occupy both the role of the governor and the governed, rejecting rigid concepts like dominance or hegemony which undergirds the neo-liberal epistemology.³²⁷ Here, roles are designated based on necessity and shifting circumstances, playing to the strengths of each member at a given time in pursuit of equitable resolutions.³²⁸ Incorporating Indigenous scholarship and activism into the UN is essential in shifting away from the current dysfunctional hierarchy and into a more egalitarian and intelligent heterarchy.

The Western model of development has enforced this unequal hierarchy, resulting in a prioritization of economic growth at the expense of the earth’s natural resources. The West’s prioritization of limitless production is also directly linked to colonialism. Specifically, colonial powers had access to far more natural resources, contributing to the idea of unlimited production and exacerbating their ecological footprint.³²⁹ This neglectful treatment of the earth’s natural resources in pursuit of economic advancement has created a hierarchical structure between

³²⁷ Crumley, Carole L. “Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies.” 1

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

³²⁹ Jean-Louis Martin, Virginie Maris, and Daniel S. Simberloff, “The Need to Respect Nature and Its Limits Challenges Society and Conservation Science,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 22 (2016), 6106.

humans and the natural world, which in turn, has led to major environmental issues like the GPGP. To address the GPGP and prevent future environmental disasters, the global community must move away from prioritizing economic progress at the expense of natural resources. Instead, the international community should follow the lead of Indigenous practices, which view the land as a part of our being rather than a means of survival.³³⁰ Here we introduce the concept of grounded normativity. The three principles of which are as follows: (1) “humans are interrelated with the more-than-human world,” (2) “interrelationality demands that humans develop ethical relationships with others,” and (3) “these ethical relationships can be learned and enacted through engagement with the more-than-human world.”³³¹ By incorporating these ideals and replacing the dominant praxes which operate in global politics, we can ultimately function towards addressing the current issues of the GPGP, while preventing such instances from reoccurring. Following the Indigenous approach of viewing humans as interrelated with the natural world can help us better understand the hierarchical structures of the settler/Indigenous and human/non-human relations, which can help transform our international society’s unethical and oppressive underpinnings.³³² Our goal is that by shifting away from these hierarchical structures that view the earth as an unlimited resource and following the lead of Indigenous environmental practices, we can prevent future environmental disasters like the GPGP from occurring.

Moving Forward

³³⁰ Annie L. Booth, “We Are the Land: Native American Views of Nature,” *Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science*, (2003), 329-349, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-0149-5_17, 329.

³³¹ Kapron, Benjamin J. “Cacophonous Settler Grounded Normativity: Interrelationality with the More-Than-Human World as a Path for Decolonial Transformation.” Abstract.

³³² Ibid., 95.

We have broken up recommendations into three distinct parts realized by an overarching idea. The utilization of Indigenous leaders and activists in an advisory capacity is critical in formulating and enacting these recommendations. Indigenous peoples must be given a seat at the table if the UN is to alleviate the issues plaguing the High Seas. This addresses concerns of hierarchy within the UN system by incorporating a traditionally neglected perspective and shifting the focus away from a purely economic standpoint. By redefining the commons as storied space, we can incorporate the principles of Wansolwara, as well as the ideas offered by the noken praxis. By doing this, we can secure the expanded and continued presence of Pacific Indigenous peoples in forging a solution to the GPGP, while setting this practice as a precedent for other ecological issues. This by extension, works to replace global hierarchies with a more level playing field, balancing the human and non-human worlds, using concepts like grounded normativity. It also works to chip at the issues of sovereignty within the UN that have excluded Indigenous representation at the General Assembly; we offer a palatable and more pluralistic version of inclusion that works around Westphalian sovereignty for integration. We see this as a method of being proactive, both towards the current situation, and in preventing a future recurrence, both in pollution and colonial perpetuation.

The first of our recommendations is geared towards the prevention of ocean exploitation. By utilizing advanced tracking methods not already in use, it allows a quicker reaction to rapid population decline in areas affected by the GPGP, which are spread considerably because of ocean currents. This would enable non-compliant areas to be studied further and subsequent actions resolved before mass ecosystem collapse. Areas most affected by pollution and other exploitative practices are ocean gyres, which in the Pacific are focused along the Alaskan coast

and along islands such as Hawaii in the center of both North and South Pacific gyres.³³³ Most environmental consequences can be avoided by focusing prevention efforts on these areas of accumulation. Including Indigenous voices within the UN beyond a token capacity, enables the reconceptualization of the ocean currents and gyres toward a shared global effort.

Our next recommendations fall under the concept of promotion. Promotion includes economic and social support towards those most affected by the GPGP, namely subsistence fishers who lack the means to counteract the ocean pollutants that are changing their environment and livelihoods. By assisting these people, one would be supporting remote communities and their ecologically friendly fishing practices. Assistance includes the protection of ocean preserves, allowing communities to continue to fish while excluding fishing trawlers that destroy the coral ocean bed. This has previously been done by former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, who instituted an 830,000-kilometer contiguous ocean reserve around the Pitcairn Islands; this had significant effects on both the economy and biodiversity of the area. Ocean reserves also have long-lasting implications for the socioeconomic value of ownership. Including Indigenous peoples with increased support of their economic activities in the water can provide a buy-in incentive to listen to Indigenous perspectives and respect their waters.³³⁴

Our last area of focus is prosecution. State and non-state actors have been involved in the exploitation and subsequent disinterest toward the health of our oceans. By implementing firmer controls and fines towards vessels and states that do not heed environmental regulations, one can

³³³ Miriam C. Goldstein, Andrew J. Titmus, and Michael Ford, "Scales of Spatial Heterogeneity of Plastic Marine Debris in the Northeast Pacific Ocean," *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 11 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0080020>, 1.

³³⁴ Justin Alger and Peter Dauvergne, "The Politics of Pacific Ocean Conservation: Lessons from the Pitcairn Islands Marine Reserve," *Pacific Affairs* 90, no. 1 (January 2017), 31, <https://doi.org/10.5509/201790129>.

not only “name and shame” but provide an income towards the alleviation of the GPGP, without utilizing funds originally allocated elsewhere or forcing smaller states to give up their revenue. By reconfiguring sovereignty to include respect for Indigenous beliefs, we can provide a legal justification for non-state actors to be prosecuted outside of our current legal interpretation. Allowing Indigenous groups to actively bring non-state actors to court would allow them to gain better agency, provide a legal foundation for the continued respect for the ocean, and force non-state actors to adhere to beneficial and sustainable fishing practices.

Our oceans remain foundational to our continued survival on earth. Thus, we propose it is imperative that we fight for our survival. As the great Sir David Attenborough said, “If we don’t take action, the collapse of our civilizations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon.”³³⁵

³³⁵ Damian Carrington, “David Attenborough: Collapse of Civilisation Is on the Horizon,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, December 3, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/dec/03/david-attenborough-collapse-civilisation-on-horizon-un-climate-summit>, 1.

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